

Judge Dismissed Case Aimed at Boosting Illinois Purses, But Horsemen Will Keep Advocating to Right the Wrong of 'Recapture'

Since 1995, Illinois Tracks Have Removed \$284 Million from Horsemen's Purses

*Statement from Illinois Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association,
Illinois Harness Horsemen's Association,
Illinois Horsemen's Benevolent & Protective Association and
Illinois Thoroughbred Breeders and Owners Foundation*

We are deeply disappointed in a Cook County judge's decision to dismiss a case aimed at rectifying the state government's failure to reimburse Illinois purse accounts, as required by law, after tracks deplete those accounts to subsidize their own operations.

Under Illinois statute, the General Assembly "shall appropriate sufficient funds" to replenish the purse accounts after tracks take dollars under the practice known as recapture. But in the absence of an appropriation - it's been 17 years since lawmakers approved one - the judge decided last week that he cannot force the state to act.

Tracks rely on the statute when they appear before the Illinois Racing Board each year and seek to obtain funds from the horsemen's purse accounts. The IRB invokes the law when, over the strong objection of horsemen, it insists on certifying the maximum subsidy for tracks. All that we asked, through the lawsuit brought by horsemen and breeders, was for the court to order the state to follow the same law and restore purses to the levels they earned from handle.

Since 1995, when recapture began, Illinois tracks have collected a staggering \$284 million from the horsemen's purse accounts - \$180 million from thoroughbred purses and \$104 million from standardbred purses. (The state government reimbursed the purse accounts from 1998 to 2001, according to the Illinois Racing Board, but the vast majority of total dollars swiped from purses - those taken since 2001 - were not restored.)

In 2018 alone, tracks will take \$11.1 million from thoroughbred and standardbred purses. Imagine if that money had been used as intended this year. Such a huge improvement would help halt the exodus of racing jobs from our state, preserve what remains of breeding, attract additional bettors, and ultimately, grow field size and handle.

While we are displeased with the court's decision last week, we are not discouraged from our commitment to combat the stifling effect of recapture. Anybody can sit on the sidelines and complain; horsemen and breeders are taking actual and meaningful steps to free our sport and industry from this albatross.

We will continue to urge Illinois lawmakers to reimburse the purse accounts, as required by law following recapture, as part of the state's \$38.5 billion budget. And we encourage the tracks and other racing stakeholders to join us in this pursuit. We also will intensify our efforts in the coming legislative session to advocate for passage of a measure that will authorize gaming at tracks for the express purpose of boosting purses - and that will end, immediately and unequivocally, the egregious practice of recapture.