



**Testimony before the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee
Agriculture Secretary Russell C. Redding
February 26, 2020**

Chairman Causer, Chairman Pashinski, and distinguished members of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss HB 1983 today.

In 2016, the Horse Racing Act was amended and added to the Agriculture Code. At that time, a four-year provision was put into place that the expenses related to the collection and research of testing racehorses for medication would come from a transfer from the Race Horse Development Trust Fund (RHDTF). As you know, on June 30, 2020, this provision will expire, and these costs will revert to the State Racing Fund, which cannot support these costs.

Medication and drug testing are necessary and ongoing aspects of enforcing the integrity of horse racing within the commonwealth. In addition to the routine testing, as authorized by the 2016 Racing Act, the State Horse Racing Commission conducts out-of-competition testing which serves as a significant deterrent to the use of illegal foreign substances. HB 1983 would remove the “sunset” provision to ensure that the testing program continues to be funded through a transfer from the Race Horse Development Trust Fund.

The University of Pennsylvania’s Pennsylvania Equine Toxicology and Research Laboratory (PETRL) and its New Bolton Center provide testing and research for the Pennsylvania racing industry. This work includes analyzing plasma and urine samples from horses participating in racing for the presence of foreign substances. The partnership also conducts a toxicology research program identifying foreign substances and their effects on race horses and recommends therapeutic medication thresholds that the State Racing Commission can adopt to ensure a level playing field among race horses.

The PA Equine Toxicology and Research Laboratory is one of the only four laboratories (out of 22) in the USA that has been fully accredited since 1996 by the American Association of Laboratory Accreditation (A2LA), to perform drug testing in race horse samples.

With the increase from four to six racetracks in Pennsylvania resulting in increased number of test samples (urine and blood samples from racehorses, tissue samples from postmortem and special samples collected during special investigations at the tracks), the workload averages 35,000 samples per year.

In addition to increased testing and increased public accountability, the State Horse Racing Commission adopted Temporary Regulations, as authorized by the General Assembly, completely updating and overhauling its outdated regulations. These temporary regulations have allowed the State Horse Racing Commission to focus on the safety of the horse racing industry by fostering safe racing through the development and enforcement of safety standards and regulations for the health and welfare of all participants. To assist in this vital mission, the State Horse Racing Commission undertook proactive measures and formed the Equine Racing Group to study, review and make recommendations to the Commission. The Equine Racing Group, which is an advisory group, consists of three (3) State Racing



Commissioners, two (2) Thoroughbred Horsemen’s organization representatives, two (2) Standardbred Horsemen’s organization representatives, one (1) representative from the Thoroughbred and Standardbred Breeding organizations, one (1) representative from the Thoroughbred and Standardbred racetracks, one (1) Commission veterinarian representing the Thoroughbred and Standardbred industry and one (1) individual representing the public. The group’s objective is to make health, welfare and safety recommendations to the Commission that reduce the potential for racing and training injuries and fatalities using evidence based best practices.

The Equine Racing Group has convened multiple meetings and collaborated with Mid-Atlantic jurisdictions to develop goals and objectives, including developing best practices, increasing awareness and understanding of conditions associated with injury, and defining roles and accountability of the stakeholders.

The race horse testing program, in conjunction with the efforts of the State Horse Racing Commission, have been crucial to upholding the safety and integrity of racing. If the sunset provision takes effect, the RHDTF will no longer be the funding source and all costs associated with the testing program will have to be paid by the Commission. The deletion of the “sunset” will allow the ongoing transfer of funds from the RHDTF in perpetuity. There are insufficient funds in licensing fees and the pari-mutuel taxes to fund the testing program. After thorough analysis, the Race Horse Development Trust Fund is the only reliable funding source. Race horse testing is the key component to maintain integrity which is the driving force for sustainability for racing.

Removal of the sunset provision is the most critical change needed to ensure there is a future for Pennsylvania racing.

I would be happy to address any questions you and other members of the committee might have at this time.

Thank you.