



RAMEY EQUINE GROUP

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January 24, 2024

TO: Los Angeles City Council

FROM: Los Angeles Equine Advisory Committee

RE: Proposed ban on rodeo, aka "The Rodeo Ordinance"

Dear Los Angeles City Councilpersons,

The Los Angeles Equine Advisory Committee (LAEAC) was created by the City Council to Advise it on matters pertaining to horses. During the City Council meeting of December 5, 2023, the name of the Committee was specifically invoked ("...the chair of the equine committee...") by Councilman Blumenfield, who stated, ""It was actually at the suggestion of the chair of the equine committee that they're saying, 'You're going through all these machinations, why don't you just ban rodeo outright, if that's what you want to do.'"

First, the LAEAC would like to recognize the efforts of Councilpersons, Rodriguez, Lee, and Padilla in bringing thoughtful comments to the discussion of this ordinance.

Second, the LAEAC is ready to assist in drafting of any future ordinance so that potential problems can be recognized and addressed prior to consideration.

Third, this letter is to provide the context that was missing in Councilman Blumenfield's comments, so as to accurately convey the LAEAC position about this matter, which is contained in the City Council file, and which has also been stated in our Letter to the Editor of the LA Times, January 20, 2023, "Letters to the Editor: Why horse experts are wary of L.A.'s rodeo proposal." This is necessary because of proposed changes to the original ordinance.

In regards to rodeo, the City Council is debating a matter of opinion, not fact. That is, allegations of "inhumane instruments of torture" and "animal cruelty" are the strongly held opinion of a minority group of individuals. It must also be pointed out that the State of California and the County of Los Angeles have rules pertaining to animal cruelty. In fact, the California Penal Code defines animal cruelty as the malicious or intentional maiming, mutilation, torture or wounding of a living animal. Any person who overworks, tortures, torments, deprives of necessary food, drink or shelter, cruelly beats, mutilates or cruelly kills an animal is guilty of a misdemeanor or felony. Otherwise stated, if rodeo is *de facto* animal cruelty, it should be easy enough to prosecute those engaging in rodeo under those statutes and stop it. Of course, that has not been done heretofore.

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The concerns of LAEAC were that the initial ordinance, as initially proposed, was overly broad, with potential implications for other equestrian events, due to its labeling of tools used in equestrian activities – spurs, ropes, etc. – as inherently cruel and inhumane. While there are other options available to the City Council besides an outright ban on selected rodeo events, if this the route that the City Council chooses to follow, the LAEAC recommends that any such ban should be narrowly worded and very specific, so as to ensure that myriad other equestrian activities not be affected. Specifically:

1. “Rodeo” is not an event, rather, it is a large group of events, using different species of animals, under different conditions, that may include bull riding, barrel racing, tying a ribbon on a goat’s tail, calf roping, and many others. Thus, any ordinance that is proposed should be event-specific.
2. As noted above, the circumstances under which some events are held differ greatly. Professional team roping, where the event is timed, animals are run at full speed and roped is far different from recreational team roping, such as is practiced at locations in LA City, where amateurs leisurely ride their horses (compared to professionals) and see if they can loop a rope around a steer. Thus, any proposed ordinance should also be narrowly applied to professional performances, if such an ordinance is deemed necessary.
3. Any regulations should be framed with cultural sensitivity, given that horses have been an important part of the cultural life of many different groups in Los Angeles, for many, many years.

An apt analogy is the meat industry. As everyone is aware, there are those that feel that, as with rodeo, the meat industry is relentlessly and routinely cruel to animals, inhumane, and wrong. The State of California heard those concerns and in 2018 it passed Proposition 12, requiring that breeding pigs be confined to a pen with no less than 24 square feet of floor space, allowing them to fully turn around in their living area. Proposition 12 was implemented last year. In recognizing concerns about inhumane treatment of breeding pigs, the State passed a law regulating how pigs should be kept, but it did not ban bacon. Similarly, it should also be possible to implement additional regulations for the health and safety of animals used in specific rodeo events, rather than banning those events altogether. In fact, this has been, and is, the recommendation of the LAEAC.

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If, however, in the opinion of the City Council, certain rodeo events are thought to be undesirable, and if the City Council does not want those events held in the City of Los Angeles, it is certainly within the Council's purview to ban those events. However, the position of the LAEAC is that if the City Council feels that certain rodeo events should be banned, they should be examined on an individual basis and factually analyzed prior to any action, not banned on inflammatory and emotional rhetoric that is often quite simply wrong. It would be helpful if interested Council members would take time to go behind the scenes and see how events are conducted, rather than make accusatory statements that may simply inflame Angelenos who may hold different opinions about rodeo. The LAEAC would be happy to assist in setting up such demonstrations.

Lastly, the LAEAC can confidently assert that no one involved in the performance of rodeo has any interest in being cruel to animals. Everyone involved in rodeo has a vested interest in seeing that the sport is as safe and humane as humanly possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David W. Ramey", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

David W. Ramey, DVM
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