

**Written Testimony Concerning  
Standardbred Horse Racing Development  
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**Before the Pennsylvania Gaming Oversight Committee and the  
Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee  
Joint Public Hearing  
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Good morning Chairman James and members of the committees. My name is Michael Izzo. I currently serve as Chief Financial Officer of the Pennsylvania Harness Horsemen's Association, or P.H.H.A.

Im pleased to testify her e today about the impact of Act 71 on the Pennsylvania standardbred industry. It pleases me even more to report that this legislation has exceeded our expectations and defied the negative voices who regarded it as nothing more than temporary life support for a dying industry.

As a former owner and driver, I can tell you what those of us inside the industry knew all along. Pennsylvania has long possessed the talent and the stock to compete nationally and internationally. What we lacked was simply a level playing field and the financial incentives required to stimulate investment in the standardbred industry.

Act 71 first leveled the playing field, and once that was accomplished, it quickly created the proper conditions for investment that has resulted in increased investment and development of farms, facilities, breeding programs and virtually every aspect of the sport. Harness horse racing, and all of its related industries, is better for it.

Allow me to cite some examples. In general terms, Pennsylvania is now arguably the top destination in the United States for standardbred racing. The media - both industry publications and mass media - have recognized and reported extensively on Pennsylvanias new place of prominence on the national racing scene. In addition, the racing surfaces of both tracks have been singled out for praise by some of the countrys most successful and experienced trainers and drivers.

In 2008, Harrahs Chester Racetrack and Casino will award an estimated \$30 million in purses. Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs was able to offer close to \$15 million in total purses. It should be noted that this is for an abbreviated 95-day meet that was scheduled to make way for the construction of a state-of-the-art, \$5 million paddock.

Both tracks have seen an abundance of horses. Never before in Pennsylvania history have we seen such healthy competition. And competition leads to a beneficial cycle of improvement, season after season. Breeders must improve their programs to keep up. Trainers must do so also. Only the best drivers can effectively compete as well. Even the tools and technology of harness racing improve when fractions of a second can make all the difference between a win or place finish. The result of this competition attracts new spectators and helps maintain the interest of longtime fans.

Collectively, these positive developments have led to increased fan interest everywhere Pennsylvania racing is simulcast, as well as investment from outside the Commonwealth. You can see the effect in handle. Total handle has increased substantially each year since the passage of Act 71. In 2008, the year-to-year handle increase at Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs was up approximately 40%, while Harrahs Chester Racetrack and Casino have seen a 60% increase.

Pennsylvania horses set records on an almost weekly basis, and it seems as if were making history with each passing meet. This years highlight was undoubtedly Super Stakes Sunday at Harrahs Chester, which offered the single largest total combined purse in Pennsylvania racing history - \$2.3 million. The facility was packed with spectators, along with media from surrounding states. It was truly a day to remember.

Act 71 has also allowed our organization to increase the health benefits we offer our members and create a retirement savings program which some of our members are already vested in. Make no mistake. Harness racing, like any other professional sport, has its share of risks and these programs allow us to provide the same security to our members that other professional athletes, coaches and support personnel enjoy. They make it that much more appealing for young talent to become part of the industry.

In summary, Im pleased to report that, from our vantage point, Act 71 has gone further than any previous legislation to stimulate the standardbred horse racing industry - as well as the many businesses, large and small, connected to it. Using current trends as a gauge, it is likely that we will continue to see healthy growth and development over the next several years. Quite simply, Pennsylvania is now setting the standard for other states to follow and the people involved in our sport have no intention of resting on their laurels when there is so much left to accomplish, and so many benefits to be had from doing so.