

THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION



Richard Land, D.Phil. (*Oxon.*), President

May 4, 2009

The Honorable Thomas Jackson, Chairman
Agriculture and Forestry Committee
Alabama House of Representatives
11 South Union Street
Montgomery, AL 36130

Dear Representative Jackson:

I am writing to request that the Agriculture Committee favorably report Representative Cam Ward's cockfighting legislation, H.B. 245, out of committee, and that you work to secure passage of this legislation. As you are most likely aware, H.B. 245 would make cockfighting a class A misdemeanor on the first offense, and a felony on any subsequent offense.

As stated in the Southern Baptist Convention's 1997 resolution, "The tidal wave of gambling in our country has left in its wake pain and destruction in the lives of countless people..." Alabama presently has the weakest prohibition against cockfighting in the nation. As a result, the state has become a refuge for people involved in that form of gambling. A recent raid in Randolph County is a testament to that fact. Two-thirds of the nearly 150 people arrested had come to Alabama from Georgia, where cockfighting is a felony. No doubt, many of these people came into Alabama because they knew if they were arrested they faced nothing more than a \$50 fine. The Randolph County Sheriff's Department reported that they found various narcotics on the scene. This demonstrates that Alabama's anemic law against cockfighting not only attracts people involved in animal cruelty and illegal gambling, but also people that are transporting illegal drugs.

Other raids on cockfighting pits in Alabama have shown the same relationship between cockfighting and other crimes. The Marshall County sheriff raided a large cockfighting pit in 2008. Children were present at the cockfight, exposed to a scene of adults screaming out bets and exchanging gambling dollars as the roosters ripped each other apart. To add insult to injury, a trailer was found on the property that was being used as a prostitution den.

Winners of these cockfighting derbies often walk away with \$10,000 to \$15,000. The only way to eradicate this crime is to set a penalty that offsets those huge gambling profits. I urge to bring H.B. 245 to a vote, and to work to ensure that we have the yes votes to guarantee passage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Barrett Duke'.

Barrett Duke, Ph.D.
Vice President for Public Policy and Research

CC: Speaker of the House Seth Hammett and the editors of the Mobile Press Register, the Birmingham News, and the Montgomery Advertiser.