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TO: HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FEDERAL AND STATE AFFAIRS
FROM: JUSTINE STATEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, KANSAS HORSE COUNCIL
RE: Written Testimony supporting HB2545, an act relating to horse and greyhound racing

I represent the voice of the equine industry as the director of the Kansas Horse Council. Kansas Horse Council is a non-profit organization providing education, industry support, and public policy advocacy to our constituents. We have membership and representation in all 105 Kansas counties comprised of individuals, families as well as clubs and associations. We are diverse in disciplines and experiences within the horse world, but united in our goal to see our heritage – involvement in the horse industry – remain strong in this great state.

Per last survey, the Kansas horse population was approx. 107,000 head with a big percentage of that directly related to the horse racing industry. Despite our thriving past, the racing industry in Kansas has suffered. Declining resources due to the significant increase in competition for recreational spending since 2007 has led breeders to move their operations out of state. Lack of funding for purses has caused individuals to take their racehorses to other states where they have a chance to make more money. Loss of jobs, loss of the economy, loss of tourism opportunities all negatively impact the economy.

I hear often from animal science, agriculture, general business majors along with veterinary science students that they would appreciate more job opportunities in-state in their field of interest. Casinos offer business graduates administrative and management opportunities. The racing industry drives breeding operations back into the state (who have moved out due to no training or racing facilities since track closures). This creates jobs for the future graduates of agriculture, animal sciences and veterinary science who desire hands on caregiving jobs and/or feed production/sales jobs. These are just a few industry growth opportunities of many. It is largely a domino effect.

If legislators vote to level the casino tax rates to be equitable between the state subsidized casinos vs. the privately unsubsidized casinos, then the unsubsidized private businesses can operate horse and dog racing tracks in Kansas once again.

It is the casino income that helps to increase the purse opportunities on the track side which brings in the bigger players. This brings in the spectators and bettors- a tourism opportunity. To be concerned about the competition between state funded casinos vs. private owned casinos seems fruitless already when compared to the competition of native American owned casinos who are tax free and ever growing. At the very least the state should consider leveling the taxation between state owned and private industry. This can only serve to double the potential for tax revenues as something from the private industry is better than nothing!

The Kansas Horse Council supports HB2545. The positive results for the good of the whole economy and specifically the good of our industry would be remarkable. This would stimulate the horse population which has numerous secondary benefits to the grain and hay producers, farm retailers, veterinarians, marketing industry, educational opportunities and more. Additionally, it would provide supportive funding for public programs such as Therapeutic Riding Centers, Equine Rescue Facilities, Tourism, Seminars, Trail Development, Scholarships for Enrichment and Education, plus Research and Development.

The Kansas Horse Council supports HB2545 due to the benefits and economic impact this represents to Kansas and the equine industry. We urge your favorable consideration for an equitable tax structure to the privately funded casinos which in turn supports our racing industry and economy as a whole!