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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
COMMONWEALTH *of* PENNSYLVANIA

***House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing***

**Fighting Animal Fighting**

**Wednesday, February 19, 2025 | 12:00 p.m.**

**Animal Protection Caucus**

**OPENING REMARKS**

**12:00 p.m.** Rep. Mary Isaacson, D-Philadelphia

**PANEL ONE**

**12:05 p.m.** Patrick Knoll, Humane Police Officer  
*Humane Society of Harrisburg*

Janette Reeve, Deputy Manager of Animal Fighting Investigations  
*Humane Society of the United States*

*Q & A with Legislators*

Janette Reeve  
Humane World for Animals  
1255 23<sup>rd</sup> Street NW, Suite 450  
Washington, DC 20037

February 17, 2025

Representative Jason Ortitay  
46th Legislative District  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives

Dear Honorable J. Ortitay:

I am writing in support of what was 2328 in the regular session of 2021-2022.

My name is Janette Reeve, and I have been employed with Humane World for Animals, formerly known as the Humane Society of the United States, since 2009. My role is investigating animal fighting, working with law enforcement to help build cases and testify in court. I am a court-recognized expert in both dog and cockfighting and work closely with state and federal law enforcement. Over the years, I have seen firsthand how dogfighting is not just a barbaric crime against animals but a crime that takes down a community.

Dogfighting has no barriers between race, religion, education, or economics. It is a breeding ground for violence and criminal enterprise. Dogfighters are commonly involved in other nefarious activities, including child sexual assault, domestic violence, illegal firearms, drug trafficking, and money laundering. They operate under the belief that what happens in the pit stays in the pit, creating an environment where lawlessness thrives. This is why dog fighting is considered a cluster crime, one that spreads its harm far beyond the animals it victimizes.

The cruelty inflicted on these animals is extreme. Dogs who do not make it to the age of fighting or fail to meet expectations are often disposed of in grotesque and inhumane ways by hanging, electrocution, beaten to death, etc. These acts of extreme depravity are not just about animal abuse; they desensitize individuals, including children, to violence, fostering a cycle of brutality that spills into families and communities.

It is important to emphasize that dogs bred and raised for fighting are victims. They are not willing participants in these fights; they are forced into battle through abuse and conditioning. Many people wrongly assume that dogs rescued from fighting operations are inherently dangerous, but in reality, most are resilient, capable of rehabilitation, and deserving of a second chance. Many dogs rescued from dog fighting operations go on to live peacefully with other animals and families, proving that they are not inherently dangerous. Some even become therapy and service dogs, helping victims of trauma and PTSD rebuild their lives. Their ability to overcome the abuse they endured is a testament to their innocence and capacity for healing.

A case that haunts me to this day exemplifies the devastating ripple effects of dog fighting. In 2010, I received a call from a school resource officer about a child crying and acting out in class. This officer had a strong rapport with the boy and knew he came from a troubled home. The child

revealed that his father had hung his favorite dog because the dog did not perform well in a fight. This boy, already living in an abusive environment, had to endure the additional trauma of watching his beloved pet tortured and killed.

During my investigation, I discovered that his father was a convicted sexual predator with a history of child molestation dating back to 1996. Despite clear evidence of dog fighting, the county authorities failed to take meaningful action, citing a lack of resources to investigate and investigate other crimes against humans. The man continued his expansive dogfighting operation with impunity for years until he relocated in 2016.

I checked in on that boy occasionally through his public social media accounts. In 2023, I was devastated to learn that he had been sentenced to 20 years to life for his role in a homicide. I often wonder: if he had been removed from that violent environment as a child, could his life have taken a different path?

This case is not unique. I have seen this cycle of violence play out repeatedly over my years of investigating dog fighting. Children raised in homes where violence is normalized often become victims or perpetrators of violence themselves.

Law enforcement needs the tools and financial backing to allow them to pursue the criminals who are involved in dogfighting and other vicious felonies. Without support, their hands are tied, and their barbaric activities continue. This is why I am in full support of what was House Bill 2328 in the regular session of 2021-2022.

Dog fighting is a violent, organized crime that leaves a path of destruction in its wake. If we fail to take it seriously, we are failing not just animals but people, especially the most vulnerable among us.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janette Reeve".

Janette Reeve

Animal Crimes and Investigations

Global Animal Rescue and Response

240-252-8400

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**IO NON COMBATTO**  
**A Case Study of Dogfighting in the U.S.**



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**I. Detecting Elements and Clues of Dog Fighting in the United States**

Investigators should always be aware of the potential for evidence of dog fighting in other criminal investigations. In the U.S., many of these investigations focus on other types of organized crime such as drug trafficking, gangs, and Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO).

Some of the common terms associated with dog fighting include: references to weight and sex of the dog in combination with a number and the terms “and gamble.” For example, you might hear, through an informant or wiretap, “I have a 40 female I’ll do for 15 and gamble.” This is an indication the subject has a 40-pound (18.8 kilo) female he/she is willing to fight for an initial bet of \$15,000 and any additional bets placed while around the pit. You may also hear references to “bloodline” and “champion” in conversations. In the U.S., fighters may refer to “hog hunting”

while actually referencing a dog fight. In many states it is legal to use dogs to hunt feral pigs.



Some common items you may see while executing Search Warrants or conducting traffic stops of individuals involved in dog fighting include: heavy chains, Dexamethasone, Hydrocodone cough syrup, “break sticks” which are

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generally a wooden stick used to pry open the mouths of the dogs, leashes, collars, crates, numerous large bags of dog food and treadmills.

In the case of Operation Pit Boss, I was assigned to investigate a Murder-for-Hire plot involving an ongoing prosecution of members of the Westside Boys violent gang. During the interview of a Cooperating Defendant, I learned that he had been traveling to the Auburn, Alabama area to attend what was described as “milliondollar a night dog fights.” At first, the information sounded absurd until I received additional statements from defendants in other investigations across the Southeastern portion of the U.S.

## **II. Initiating an Investigation**

Alright, you have enough information to open a case. Now what?

With Pit Boss, I had enough information from multiple sources to believe that dog fights were being hosted in Auburn by a man named “Donnie.” I knew absolutely nothing about animal fighting or gambling investigations. I believed that all dog fights were a fight to the death. I read everything I could find on the history of the blood sport. At the time, there had been two other large dog fighting investigations in the U.S. One involving professional football player, Michael Vick, and another involving groups in Missouri and Illinois. I spoke with investigators from both cases to learn from their experiences. The Assistant United States Attorney (AUSA) assigned to the case also spoke to the AUSAs in both of these investigations. She obtained motions filed by the defense to help us anticipate what might happen in our case. You should:

- Research
- Read
- Learn from others
- Plan for and anticipate problems

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- Find good partners (A prosecutor who believes in the case, a local veterinarian you trust to ask questions, and Co-Case investigator)
- Talk with other investigators in the area working drug or organized crime cases

You should also consider keeping your investigation confidential and don't share with any agency or investigator that does not have a need to know. We learned very early in our investigation of individuals in Law Enforcement (LE) who were involved. We also learned of Vet Techs who were possibly treating injured dogs and providing some medicines to the fighters.

### **III. Developing Confidential Informants (CIs)**

In my experience, dog fighting has no biases. All races and ethnicities may be involved. I learned from my informants of the common mindset "If you're standing at the box placing bets, you're not a cop!" I also heard "every other crime you want to commit can be negotiated around the box."

You should look to other cases, agencies, and Animal Protection Organizations (APOs) to help develop solid CIs. I worked with DEA and FBI in Georgia, Florida, Mississippi and Tennessee to develop CIs. I also worked with my local agency (Auburn PD) partner to develop CIs close to the organization here. Several of my CIs had already plead guilty to the distribution of 50 kilograms or more of cocaine. The fact that the Judges would allow them to remain out of jail and cooperate in our case was a surprising and unanticipated benefit to the case. I learned just as much, if not more, about dog fighting from my informants as I did my APO partners.

**\*\* This is the time to approach APOs about documenting their support in letters and/or Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) for your agency's participation, in animal fighting. You WILL send CIs and Undercover Officers (UCOs) in to participate and gamble on dog fights. If your agency won't allow this, you may have difficulty achieving a successful investigation/prosecution.**

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The purpose of the letters is to mitigate any negative public perception or Court perception regarding the agency's participation in animal fighting.

The FBI was initially very reluctant to allow CIs to participate based on fear of public condemnation. Through many discussions with APOs, the United States Attorney's Office, and FBI Executive Management, we were able to move forward with CI participation. The FBI would never allow UCOs to participate. This hampered our investigation to an extent and caused frustration for assigned investigators. This came to a head when a United States Senator, who sat on the Board of Directors for one of the APOs, wrote a letter to the FBI asking about a lack of progress in the case.

**Remember** – you are in a “partnership” with the APOs to stop illegal animal fighting. They can be an extremely powerful advocate for a thorough and detailed investigation. In addition, they are unafraid to stand beside you at the podium to answer questions from the media and others about actions taken to STOP dog fighting.

#### **IV. Evidence Considerations**

How do you handle a dog as evidence? How do you handle a deceased dog as evidence? Work with your APOs and local veterinarians to be prepared to answer these questions well in advance. Just like any other investigation involving physical evidence, you must be prepared to buy, collect, and process dogs during the course of your investigation. We purchased puppies as evidence against dog fighters during our investigation. Once they were purchased, we had to be prepared to document the animal and turn it over to an APO or vet for safekeeping/adoption.



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In addition to the purchase of dogs, we collected and processed deceased dogs as evidence. One seized from a traffic stop of a suspect departing a fight and others seized during search warrant execution. Again, you should be prepared with your APOs and local trusted veterinarians to conduct a necropsy of the dog if possible. If properly trained, the report of necropsy will be admissible in court. The below photos depict the dog we seized from the traffic stop and the skull, bones, and hair from another dog seized during a search warrant.





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**Reminder** – You should be prepared well in advance for potential condemnation from the media and/or the public regarding the death of the dogs. Some may believe you “allowed” this to occur by not acting quicker to avoid the deaths. This is mitigated by your partnerships with the APOs and the understanding that a thorough and detailed investigation is needed to truly make an impact.

Another productive method of obtaining evidence, in the form of bulk cash seizures, involved having highway patrol conduct traffic stops. These stops occurred on vehicles identified by our CIs as transporting the proceeds of gambling and winning a fight. We seized approximately \$500,000 in U.S. currency using this tactic.

## **V. Use of Advanced Technology and Investigative Methods**

In the United States, the use of a wiretap is considered the most intrusive investigative technique available. As such, it is the most reviewed and regulated investigative technique. Wiretaps are limited in use to certain types of crime in the U.S. The animal fighting statute is not one that qualifies for the use of a wiretap. Every wiretap utilized by Federal investigators requires approval from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Enforcement Operations (DOJ/OEO). Once approved by DOJ/OEO, the Affidavit and Order are presented to the senior Federal Judge in that District for review and approval. Although difficult to obtain, a wiretap can be extremely productive in producing evidence of many crimes.

In Operation Pit Boss, we learned that several of the linked drug and/or gang cases being investigated by the DEA and FBI utilized wiretaps. In discussions with other investigators, we learned that they had numerous recorded conversations discussing dog fights. I asked each agency to send me their recordings (months’ worth) where they believed their targets were discussing dog fighting. We also learned that the subjects, who would regularly speak in code regarding drug trafficking and other crime, would openly discuss dog fighting during telephone

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conversations. Through review of multiple completed wiretaps, we obtained evidence against many of our subjects. We also learned of transportation methods for dogs and currency.

Very early in the Pit Boss investigation we determined the use of fixed wing aircraft was crucial for conducting successful surveillance of dog fights. We utilized multiple FBI aircraft from small Cessna platforms to the "Nightstalker" jet. These aircraft with Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) systems were crucial for identifying and conducting surveillance of dog fighting operations in Alabama and other states. I would avoid using a helicopter at all costs. On one occasion we did not have an airplane available. I allowed an FBI helicopter pilot to talk me into using the helicopter to surveil a large fight. The participants heard the helicopter and shut down the fight based on their fear they were being surveilled. We had to suspend surveillance operations for the next two fights based on the compromise.

We also utilized traditional and non-traditional Tracking, Tagging, and Locating (TTL) technology to include GPS tracking and chemical tags. I recommend using the latest in audio/video technology to capture activity around the pit ("box"). This comes with the realization that many of your subjects may have been through the criminal justice system and are already familiar with certain types of body wires, etc. During some "elite" fights, attendees were required to drop phones, watches, and other jewelry and clothing items prior to entering the fight location.

## **VI. Other Associated Crimes**

Operation Pit Boss while focused on dog fighting, was primarily an organized crime and drug trafficking investigation. Through wiretaps and other investigative techniques, the case was linked to two "Consolidated Priority Organization Target (CPOT) Lists, a multi-agency target list of "command and control" elements of the most prolific international drug trafficking and money laundering organizations." <sup>i</sup> This is a fancy way of saying our case was linked to major drug cartels.

It is not uncommon to see other crimes such as stolen property, illegal firearms sales, sex trafficking, and even murder associated with dog fighting. During the Pit Boss investigation, we

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were contacted by a law enforcement agency in Florida regarding a murder. Investigators learned that the victim had recently returned to Florida from Auburn after attending and winning a large sum of money at one of the dog fights. Investigators believed the victim was murdered over an argument about the gambling proceeds from the dog fight. One interesting connection in our case involved a breeder and trainer named “Paulie” who resided in the Chicago area. We learned that Paulie possessed dogs from the champion bloodline of prolific breeder and dog fighter, Albert White’s “Tab.” White was known for a winning bloodline he called “Jeeps.”<sup>ii</sup> Paulie was selling his dogs for \$30,000 - \$40,000 to several individuals involved in Pit Boss. He was also believed to be selling his dogs to Cosa Nostra figures in Italy. FBI Agents in Chicago served a search warrant at Paulie’s home and discovered his champion “Tab” stuffed and sitting on a shelf.

## **VII. Case Takedown Considerations**

You should avoid the desire to “make a splash” and takedown a large fight while it’s occurring. In our case, many believed the only way to have a significant impact was to conduct a raid while the fight was occurring. We had the FBI’s Hostage Rescue Team (HRT) come to Auburn to do a site assessment and make recommendations regarding the feasibility of conducting a raid. Based on safety and logistical issues, HRT advised against it. In contrast to our approach, an agency in an adjoining state attempted to conduct an ad hoc raid on a large dog fight after we provided information. Their resulting raid involved many individuals fleeing on foot while firing weapons



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at pursuing officers. In addition, they seized as many as 30-40 vehicles which wound up being rentals with “straw” renters.

Be prepared to seize more dogs than you think. We had absolutely no expectation of seizing 367 dogs during the execution of our search warrants. Luckily, we were prepared through our



partnerships with the APOs.

You should also not attempt to arrest too many at one time. In discussions with our prosecutors, we were concerned we would overload our court system with too many defendants at one time.

Plan for large crime scenes requiring good documentation.

Remember, every dog

you seize is a piece of evidence in your case. APOs are prepared to handle this for you to a degree. Some bulky evidence may require long-term storage. The treadmill pictured below sat in an FBI office in Montgomery, Alabama for well over a year.

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### VIII. Pit Boss Conclusion

We rescued **367 dogs** from the dog fighting organization and seized over **\$500,000** in U.S. currency. Over **\$1 Million** in U.S. currency was seized in a companion DEA investigation. **Multi-kilogram** quantities of cocaine (50+) were seized from dog fighters in the Montgomery, Alabama and South Georgia areas. Search and arrest warrants were executed in **Alabama, Texas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Illinois**. Auburn, Alabama resident, Donnie Anderson, who was dubbed the “Godfather of dog Fighting” by the Judge and media was sentenced to 8 years in federal prison for orchestrating/hosting the dog fights. This was the **longest sentence in U.S. history for animal fighting violations**. **13 others** were arrested from multiple states for their role in organizing, planning, and participating in the dog fighting organization. This case remains as the largest dog fighting case in U.S. history based on the seizures and sentences. Ultimately, **486** dogs were rescued as many of the original 367 had litters while in the custody of APOs.

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<sup>i</sup> [Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces \(OCDETF\) Program \(justice.gov\)](https://www.justice.gov/ocdetf)

<sup>ii</sup> [Dogfighting cases still surfacing after state crackdown \(ajc.com\)](https://www.ajc.com)