

Veteran Horse Owner Takes Horse Race Commission to Court After Top-Earning Thoroughbred Barred From St. Thomas Race

Arturo Watlington Jr., who has owned thoroughbreds for more than 40 years, filed a pro se complaint after his horse Guillame was removed from the August 31 race card. He says the commission ignored evidence of the horse's fitness and violated its duties.

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ST. THOMAS — A longtime thoroughbred racehorse owner is asking the court to step in after the Horse Race Commission decided against allowing his horse to compete in an upcoming race.

Arturo Watlington, Jr., who says he has owned thoroughbreds for more than four decades, filed a pro se complaint on Monday. He is seeking an injunction to block commissioners from excluding

his horse, “Guillame,” from the August 31 race.

Watlington purchased Guillame in 2024 after a race in Florida. The horse ran three times in that state before moving to Puerto Rico, where he raced four times. Guillame arrived in St. Thomas in December 2024 and has since competed in three races. According to the complaint, Guillame placed first and second in two of those contests, “making him the number one money earning horse thus far in 2025.” The filing also states, “At no time while Watlington raced the horse...was the horse restricted from racing in either nationally racing accredited racing jurisdiction by any state or track veterinarian.”

Concerns about Guillame’s fitness began in April, when Watlington says he received an email from Laura Palminteri, the territory’s only equine veterinarian and also the St. John representative on the Commission. Her dual role has previously drawn accusations of conflict of interest. In the April message, Dr. Palminteri said a soundness exam found Guillame “is unfit for racing and is not racing sound,” and advised that he be retired. Watlington and Guillame’s trainer disagreed, requesting an independent examination, which never took place.

On race day, however, Watlington said Dr. Palminteri, who is named as a defendant in the lawsuit, told him Guillame was “good to go,” though she also whispered that the horse should be retired.

Before the July 5 race, Dr. Palminteri inspected Guillame again but made no adverse findings, according to the complaint. “Guillame came out of that race fine with no sign of lameness or reaction to any injury,” Watlington wrote, adding that racing officials did not inspect the horse after the event.

Nevertheless, on July 16, Watlington said he received another email from Dr. Palminteri, again urging him to retire the horse. “He is 7 years old and his front fetlocks are completely fused,” she wrote. “He will not pass the next veterinary examination.”

Watlington replied that Guillame was under the care of his own Puerto Rico-based veterinarian, who disagreed with Palminteri’s assessment. Despite this, the local veterinarian reiterated her position in another message in early August, insisting the horse not race.

In response, Watlington said he invited commissioners to observe Guillame being exercised on August 9 so they could judge the horse’s condition for themselves. No one attended. A week later, on August 16, Watlington said he received notice that Guillame would be excluded from future race cards.

That decision, according to Watlington, appeared to have come from a meeting for which neither he nor the public was notified. Guillame, already registered for the August 31 race, was removed from the program. Watlington argued that had commissioners viewed Guillame on August 9, they “would have no choice other than to disagree with the opinion of defendant Palminteri.” Their failure to do so, he claims, “is clearly a violation of their sworn duties to carry out the law according to their oaths.”

The lawsuit names commissioners Hugo Hodge Jr., Laura Palminteri, Sheldon Turnbull, and racing secretary Kareen Thompson as defendants. Watlington is asking the court for a temporary restraining order preventing Guillame’s exclusion from Sunday’s race, and for a hearing to determine whether a preliminary injunction should follow.