

The Virgin Islands Consortium

U.S. Attorney's Office Reminds Virgin Islanders That Cockfighting is Banned; Violators of Law Face 5-Year Prison Sentence

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United States Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert on Tuesday advised residents of the Virgin Islands that the Agricultural Improvement Act (P.L. 115-334) prohibits animal fighting everywhere in the United States, including the territories.

“Law enforcement officers in our communities have received recent reports that cockfighting matches are continuing, even though the federal law prohibiting these activities went into effect on December, 20, 2019. Cockfighting promoters need to understand that participation in an animal fighting venture is a felony that carries a

penalty up to five years in prison.”

Federal law has also prohibited any shipment of fighting birds to the territories from the states since 2002. This crime has constituted a felony offense since 2007. In a recent case in Puerto Rico, a federal judge ruled against claims made by a cockfighting coalition, challenging Congress’ authority to expand its ban on cockfighting to the U.S. territories.

Shappert noted that federal law prohibits a wide range of activities associated with animal fighting ventures, to include knowingly sponsoring, exhibiting, or attending these events. An “animal fighting venture” is one that “involves a fight conducted or to be conducted between at least 2 animals for purposes of sport, wagering, or entertainment” apart for hunting. The law also prohibits the selling, buying, training, transporting, delivering or receiving of animals for fighting, and the trafficking in knives or gaffs used on birds.

“We are especially concerned with the proliferation of cockfighting during the coronavirus pandemic,” Shappert said. “The World Health Organization has identified the illegal transport of cockfighting birds as a health risk for people and animals. Fighting birds that have been infected with influenza are a source of possible transmission to humans, and this is especially dangerous when cockfighting participants are handling bloodied birds, with knives attached to the bird’s legs.” Shappert noted that in animal fighting prosecutions elsewhere in the United

States, law enforcement has often observed a close correlation between the animal fighting and other criminal activity, including violent crime, firearms offenses and mail fraud. “We are working to keep our communities safe”, Shappert said. “Everyone needs to understand that cockfighting is potentially dangerous and it’s illegal.”

To report information about possible cockfighting or other animal fighting, please contact the FBI at 787-754-6000 or the USDA-OIG Hotline, at (800) 424-9121 or via internet [here](#)

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