

# Cockfighting Ban in USVI and PR Takes Effect Today

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As of today, cockfighting is illegal in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

When it was announced last year that an amendment to the 2018 farm bill would ban the practice, the reaction in the Caribbean, specifically Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, was fierce from residents and representatives alike, with PR and USVI leaders in Washington waging a strong campaign to remove the amendment.

The effort, however, was unsuccessful, and beginning today, the federal government can prosecute persons or organizations found participating in, or facilitating cockfighting.

On Thursday, Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett penned a letter to United States Attorney for the District of the Virgin Islands, Gretchen C.F. Shappert, stating that the outlawing of cockfighting would create an underground industry and could prove problematic to enforce.

“Cockfighting, like horse racing, is a long-standing recreational activity in the U.S. Virgin Islands with historical and cultural significance to many Virgin Islanders. I do not support banning cockfighting in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 prohibits the sponsoring or exhibiting of animal fights involving live birds in the Virgin Islands and that law takes effect on December 20, 2019. I have written the U.S. Attorney’s office asking what her intentions are regarding enforcement actions and if the Virgin Islands has made any announcement to the people of the Virgin Islands regarding the prohibition of cockfighting and her position on the issue,” the delegate to Congress wrote in her letter.

She also wrote, “I understand the concerns of those opposed to cockfighting and believe regulatory processes and educational outreach provide the best means of addressing those concerns. Outlawing cockfighting in the Virgin Islands will only create an underground industry, which can prove problematic for local stakeholders and local law enforcement.”

Ms. Plaskett's letter comes amid reports that the U.S. Attorney General in Puerto Rico has vowed to "take appropriate measures with the public policies of the Dept. of Justice" once the ban takes effect.

Back in 2018 [when the cockfighting ban was attached to the farm bill](#), Ms. Plaskett said, “I am also upset that an amendment to ban cockfighting in Virgin Islands was accepted. That amendment was deeply unfair to territories of the United States and contrary to the original intent of the Animal Welfare Act Amendments of 1976. She acknowledged the concerns those opposed to cockfighting had, but added that the Government of the Virgin Islands is “the proper place to impose bans or regulatory processes to addressing those concerns. Introducing measures that are limited to the territories without any territorial delegation support is an overreach at best. The energy of those members who also do not support legislation to bring support to the children and people of the Virgin Islands is galling.”