



ONTARIO HARNESS HORSE ASSOCIATION

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May 4, 2026

The Honourable Doug Ford

Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park, Ontario

The Honourable Stan Cho

Ontario Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming
438 University Ave, 6th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1N3

Duncan Hannay, President and Chief Executive Officer
Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation
4120 Yonge Street, Suite 500
Toronto, Ontario
M2P 2B8

Subject: Proposed Fifth Amendment to the Funding Agreement for Live Horse racing (the "Fifth Amendment")

Dear Premier Ford, Minister Cho and Mr. Hannay:

I write on behalf of the nearly 2000 members of the **Ontario Harness Horse Association (OHHA)**, our province's hard working rural Ontarians who make up the vast majority of the Ontario standardbred equine agricultural industry.

OHHA was founded in 1962, our charter to represent the interests of standardbred horse people in matters of negotiation, promotion and defence of our industry and our members.

OHHA thanks our government for the unwavering support of our industry and the thousands of rural Ontarians who put their heart, soul and financial resources into it, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For many of us the equine agricultural industry is a generational pursuit fuelled by our love for our horses and a deep respect for the agrarian roots that have shaped Ontario's history. Properly supported, our industry is an economic powerhouse, supporting tens of thousands of rural Ontario jobs, contributing billions of dollars to the Ontario economy. The recently released Ontario Equine Agricultural Economic Impact Study (March 2026, enclosed within inclusive of an executive summary) clearly defines the financial contributions of Ontario's Equine Agricultural Industry generally and the horse racing industry, specifically. This report, commissioned with support from the **Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness** provides a real-time snapshot of the most current data available for your consideration. We thank our government for making this landmark report possible.

Despite, our government's unwavering support for Ontario's equine agricultural industry, horse racing in this province is facing an existential crisis.

Over the past decade we have witnessed reductions in racing opportunities, the slow and then sudden erosion of the very supports necessary to sustain, never mind promote our industry. Coincidental to this decline, we have witnessed a concentration of power centred on one corporate entity that has wrestled full control of a rural based industry away from participants and into the hands of excessively compensated executives who demonstrably have either no interest or ability to halt the spiral of a vital industry. That entity is the Woodbine Entertainment Group (WEG).

As witnessed by WEG's veto of the fifth amendment funding, 35 million taxpayer funded dollars that government rightfully intended for the grassroots racing industry, purses, breeding and participant support, our government must now clearly be aware that WEG routinely advances their corporate expectations far ahead of horse people's needs. This result was, quite sadly, predictable and avoidable.

In September of 2017, **Greg Walling**, stepped down from his advisory position to Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Jeff Leal with respect to his critical role on the horse racing file. In his letter of resignation, he cited the following;

“Beware of WEG’s dominant position. In the proposed structures of administration not only are they a player, they are scorekeeper and referee. They’re becoming too big to challenge and yet it must be recognized their success depends in large part on the significant partnership with the Ontario government and its ongoing support. With so much taxpayers’ monies invested in this company, there needs to be careful scrutiny and accountability.

To me, the WEG role continues to be the biggest challenge to the industry.”

Truer words, as they say, were never spoken.

Now almost a decade removed, the overall equine agricultural industry and specifically the horse racing industry is under savage attack. Opportunity has diminished. Racetracks have shuttered. Backstretches are a thing of the past. Expenses have skyrocketed. People are hurting. And yet, purses are down by almost the exact amount that WEG's executive salaries are up. Surely that's not what our governments expects our accepts.

In the most recent provincial budget, it was noted that WEG is set to contribute \$170 million towards the construction effort of a Rexdale subway station and related development. This is part of the WEG's plans to construct houses on the priority that EP Taylor bequeathed the Jockey Club for the preservation and expansion of horse racing and equine agricultural pursuits. And through it all, the WEG maintains that their only mandate is the preservation and promotion of horse racing.

Even if we take them at their word, every metric indicates that the WEG controlled model has been a colossal failure and an inappropriate and unaccountable use of vital taxpayer dollars. That money was rightfully intended to be directed to hard working industry participants, yet millions were diverted away from the grassroots and redirected to the WEG C suites. This must end. Right now.

I will repeat what my friends at the **Canadian Thoroughbred Horse Society** penned to you on April 10, 2026;

“Woodbine’s longstanding mandate has been to support Ontario’s horsepeople. Redirecting public funding toward its own capital and operational requirements is fundamentally inconsistent with the intent of the Fifth Amendment, with the legacy upon which this institution was built, and with what the industry fought so hard to achieve. Without public access to Woodbine’s financial records or business plans, stakeholders and funding decision-makers are left without the transparency needed to evaluate the rationale for these requests.”

And, I add, that despite the WEG’s claims to “operate like a not for profit” arguably they do not. WEG investments, money that comes from government support, are not commensurate to its core mandate. The industry is in shambles. Rural Ontarians and their families are needlessly suffering, all because WEG, as indicated by Mr. Walling, almost a decade ago, has become a monolithic giant fully and unilaterally in control of an industry being run into the ground by the very entity charged with maintaining and promoting it.

Appropriate government support in the wrong hands has proven to be little to no support at all. Together, we can do better. We promise and undertake that we will.

Sincerely,



James Whelan
OHHA/ OEEEE President