



# ONTARIO HARNESS HORSE ASSOCIATION

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## Ontario Harness Horse Association Statement on Amended Funding Agreement

The Ontario Harness Horse Association (OHHA) represents standardbred horsepeople in the province of Ontario. Its mandate is to promote the interests of its members, which include a vibrant and inclusive horse racing industry.

As you may recall, OHHA was one of the few vocal opponents of the Long Term Funding Agreement that was rolled out 3 years ago, maintaining that changes were needed to the agreement in order to better protect the horse people and the smaller racetracks in the Province. OHHA has met with, written to and spoken with, a majority of elected Members of Provincial Parliament since the original agreement was executed. As a result of this effort, along with the efforts of other similar-minded organizations and stakeholders, significant amendments to the agreement were signed and announced on Friday December 16, 2020.

This amended agreement addresses a number of concerns that OHHA identified in the original agreement. Specifically, although the agreement was meant to provide long term funding to the industry, it provided no assurances that all tracks would receive race dates or funding after the 2019/2020 racing season. The amendment addresses that fact and now every racetrack in the Province will receive, for each of the next five years, race dates and an allocation of the racetracks payment that is consistent with the 2020/2021 plan. While this is good news for racetracks that want to race, there is still no requirement for any racetrack to offer racing. OHHA has maintained that any track that has alternative gaming on site should be required to offer live racing as a protection to the horse breeding, training and racing industries.

Other highlights of the amendment include a change under the gaming expansion funds. In the original Agreement, Woodbine Entertainment Group (WEG) was required to remit certain lease payments, up to a maximum of \$51.4 million dollars per year, starting in year three of the agreement. That has now been delayed to start in the fourth year. As well, the administration payment payable

to Ontario Racing has been increased from \$3.4 million per year to \$3.9 million per year.

The amended agreement also includes language that addresses the recommendations made by the Auditor General in its Value For Money Audit of the industry released on December 4, 2019. The report may be found at [3.12 Provincial Support to Sustain the Horse-Racing Industry \(auditor.on.ca\)](#).

Many of the concerns that OHHA initially raised were identified in the report. If the OLG, Ontario Racing, Ontario Racing Management and WEG adhere to the spirit of this amendment, the result would be more transparency and accountability in the industry. We should warn, however, that such transparency and accountability has been often promised in the past, but rarely delivered. OHHA believes that the review and consideration of the Auditor General's recommendations are good news for the industry.

The last major item identified in the amended agreement is in regards to the Pari-Mutuel Tax Reduction (PMTR) funds. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is outdated and not reflective of the current industry circumstances. Ontario Racing, Ontario Racing Management and WEG have agreed to work with the OLG to review and consider reforms to the existing PMTR framework, including with respect to the allocation and distribution of PMTR funds, having regard to the funding purpose. This is another item that OHHA has consistently raised with elected officials. OHHA believes that a redistribution of the PMTR funds could benefit the horse people if done in a manner that supports the breeding, training and racing of horses in Ontario.

Despite all of these amendments, there is still a central issue which remains unresolved. In short, a determination needs to be made as to which association represents the Standardbred horsepeople. It is the position of OHHA that the horsepeople, and only the horsepeople, should make that determination. Neither WEG, nor OR, or any other agency should have the right to unilaterally determine who represents the interest of the horsepeople. The concept of self determination is pivotal to not only a healthy horse racing industry, but society at large. OHHA continues to pursue a democratic process that would allow the horsepeople to make that determination for themselves.

OHHA is grateful to the Provincial Government and all of the elected Members of Provincial Government that have assisted us in getting reforms to the original

agreement. We are confident that these changes will have positive impacts on the horse breeding and training industries.

The Provincial Government is supportive of strong horse breeding and racing industries and their involvement in pursuing these important changes to the Long Term Funding Agreement are reflective of that support.

OHHA thanks the Provincial Government and looks forward to working cooperatively to assist in ensuring that any changes are beneficial to the investors and participants in the horse breeding, training, racing and broader agricultural industries.