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November 1, 2023

Mayor Van Johnson
Savannah City Hall, 2nd Floor
2 East Bay Street
Savannah, GA 31401

RE: VETERINARY SUPPORT for Ending Carriage Horse Rides in Savannah

Dear Mayor Johnson,

The Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association is a national association of veterinary professionals with a focus on animal health and welfare. HSVMA has approximately 9,000 veterinary professional members nationwide, including 60 members in Georgia. **On behalf of our membership, HSVMA is writing in support of a legislative ban on horse-drawn carriages in the City of Savannah.**

We acknowledge that carriage horse rides in urban settings remain popular tourist attractions in many cities. Unfortunately, they place the horses in inappropriate environments that are detrimental to their health and well-being. Horse-drawn carriages and motor vehicles should not share the same roadways, as doing so puts the animals and the public at risk. With their exhaust fumes, hard road surfaces, and busy traffic patterns, cities are simply not humane—as opposed to survivable—environments for carriage horses.

As veterinary professionals with expertise in animal health and welfare, we provide more detailed enumeration below of the reasons for supporting a ban on horse-drawn carriages in the City of Savannah.

- **Sourcing of Horses for the Carriage Horse Industry**

To achieve maximum profit with a minimum expenditure of time and resources, horses purchased for urban carriage rides are selected based on prior exposure to carriage use. Those purchased at auctions (often from “killer sales”) in the northeast are typically from one of two backgrounds: the draft breeds come from Amish farms where they served as draft animals performing field work, while the smaller horses are the same communities’ retired carriage horses or are former Standardbred racehorses.

Due to their previous use, many enter urban carriage horse companies with preexisting injuries (lameness, laminitis, arthritis, strained and bowed tendons,) and illnesses such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD, or “heaves”). These preexisting conditions can have a significant impact on the horses’ well-being, suitability for, and longevity in their new occupation.

- **Handling**

Many carriage horse drivers lack knowledge about horses and have no prior experience as carriage drivers in hazardous urban environments. It is common to witness drivers chatting over their shoulders with passengers, rather than focusing on



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their horses and the surroundings ahead. It's also common to see drivers who lack control of their horses' heads due to an improper (if any) grip on the reins, and who may stand in the driver's box, which is forbidden by expert driving standards and in competitions.

- **Respiratory Disease**

Horses working in traffic with motorized vehicles are constantly nose-to-tailpipe, whether waiting for their next fare or moving with traffic. They exhibit resultant respiratory impairment, as detailed in an unpublished study conducted by Dr. Jeffie Roszel. Dr. Roszel's study analyzed New York carriage horses' respiratory health in 1985 when they were still limited to Central Park; they exhibited significant lung tissue damage and cellular changes due to their exposure to noxious vehicular emission fumes. For horses with any preexisting respiratory impairment such as COPD, a polluted urban atmosphere is a significant additional health stressor.

- **Lameness**

A lack of soundness is a major problem for horses who pound the city streets' hard, concussive surfaces throughout long shifts. Many are not given adequate farrier (horseshoe) care and since many enter this industry with preexisting injuries or arthritis, their lack of soundness will only worsen. A horse's hoof is healthiest when left unshod and properly trimmed on a regular basis. The excessive pounding on paved city surfaces makes the use of shoes indispensable, but many carriage horses do not receive the frequent maintenance needed to keep their feet healthy, especially if their stall hygiene is inadequate and they develop infections in addition to sole bruising or cracks in the hoof walls.

- **Heat Prostration**

Hyperthermia was once a leading cause of death in urban carriage horses and currently remains a significant threat in urban environments in many parts of the country. Horses in harness on hot streets, denied sufficient access to water and time to cool down, often collapsed on the streets or in their stables. For this reason, equine experts recommended that horses should be kept off the streets when the combined temperature-humidity index (THI)—which is the sum of the temperature in degrees Fahrenheit and the humidity in percentage points—exceeds 140; for as the THI increases, so does the horses' heat stress risk. One expert source states that a THI above 150 represents a serious threat to horses' health, especially if the humidity value is more than half of the combined sum.

In the critical temperature range of 89-96 degrees Fahrenheit, a large horse is greatly challenged in its ability to dissipate body heat into a hot environment, especially if high humidity is a factor. In a hot environment, a horse can lose 8-10 gallons of fluid with exercise, but if the air is saturated by high humidity, evaporative cooling cannot occur, and the horse's core temperature continues to climb. If the horse becomes dehydrated and cannot produce sweat, life-threatening anhidrosis ensues; keeping a horse well hydrated on urban streets is a challenge in these modern times with no public horse troughs.



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- **Spooking**
The horse is an animal with a highly developed and effective flight drive triggered when startled by an unexpected or threatening stimulus. Spooking can happen to even the best trained and well-mannered horses; their evolution as herbivores (prey animals) has conditioned them to bolt immediately when startled, dictating the need for carriage drivers to be in constant contact with their horses' heads. It is unlikely that novice drivers will be able to fully anticipate potentially threatening stimuli in order to control the horses before they attempt to flee in panic. The possible result of a horse spooking while pulling a carriage in congested traffic is a tragic collision between the horse and the vehicles crossing at the next intersection the panicked horse gallops through, resulting in both equine and human fatalities. Such accidents are less likely to occur if horses are restricted to areas with no operating motor vehicles.
- **Stabling**
The essential provisions for appropriate stabling for horses, often of draft breed size, whose daily shifts are spent between the extremely confining shafts of their carriages, can depend on many variables. However, to ensure a humane existence for the horses, the stables must include: box stalls (not tie stalls) that are a minimum of ten by ten feet (twelve-to-fourteen-foot square is better for the draft breeds); constant access to clean, potable water in each stall; good quality hay and grain secured in rodent- and moisture-proof containers; bedding that is sufficiently absorbent and deep to provide comfort to the animal when resting; and proper ventilation and cooling provided by fans to minimize ammonia fumes from urine.

In addition, each horse should have—and rarely gets—daily turn-out in which he/she is given a period to relax with a compatible stable mate in a large enclosure where they can roll, mutually groom one another, lie stretched out, and generally obtain relief from their arduous shifts and the discomfort of tight-fitting harnesses. In so doing, they satisfy natural behavioral and physical needs.

Although carriage horse training and driving can be done with due attention to making the experience both humane and pleasurable for horses in a proper setting, the tourist trade in contemporary urban settings cannot provide a safe and healthy environment as long as the horses are threatened by motor vehicle traffic and physically injurious environments. We therefore support the proposal to ban horse-drawn carriages in the City of Savannah.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gloria Dorsey', written in a cursive style.

Gloria Dorsey, DVM, MPH
HSVMA Georgia State Representative