

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

The Honorable Patti B. Saris  
Chair  
United States Sentencing Commission  
One Columbus Circle, N.E., Suite 2-500  
Washington DC 20002

May 28, 2015

Dear Chief Judge Saris,

As the co-chairs of the Congressional Animal Protection Caucus, the bipartisan organization committed to raising awareness for animal welfare issues in Congress, we write you concerning the current federal sentencing guidelines for animal fighting.

Animal fighting has no place in our society, and the American public wants those convicted of this crime to be punished accordingly. Congress has addressed animal fighting many times, including adding an amendment to the 2008 Farm Bill that raised the statutory maximum penalty for animal fighting from three to five years imprisonment. However, the current sentencing guidelines have not incorporated this increase. The base level offense for animal fighting remains at 6-12 months, unchanged since the passage of Animal Fighting Prohibition Enforcement Act of 2007, despite the heightened seriousness with which Congress, the public, and many judges view this terrible crime.

In the fall of 2014, U.S. District Judge Keith Watkins in Alabama handed down sentences for six of 15 defendants convicted as the result of a four-year long federal animal fighting investigation which involved over 450 dogs. As a result, the ringleader and other key members of this heinous dog fighting enterprise will be serving sentences of up to eight years in prison. In each of these sentences, the judge noted that upward variances were required because the sentencing guidelines for animal fighting were inadequate and failed to take into account the abject cruelty and the large number of dogs in this particular case.

As the sentences in Alabama made evident, the current sentencing recommendations fail to account for the violence and brutality that distinguish animal fighting from other gambling crimes. Though gambling is the driving force behind it, animal fighting is unique to this category of crime because it inflicts immense suffering and death on its victims.

In order to better reflect the changes made by Congress in 2008 and the heinous nature of animal fighting crimes, we ask that the U.S. Sentencing Commission increase the sentencing guideline's base level offense for animal fighting. We also ask that the sentencing guidelines distinguish offenses that involve a large number of animals or entail extreme animal neglect or cruelty, and provide an elevated base level offense in these cases.

Obtaining fitting and meaningful sentences for animal fighting will allow federal prosecutors and law enforcement to better deter these criminal acts. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Earl Blumenauer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike Fitzpatrick". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a large loop at the end.

Mike Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress