

Washington, D.C. — The House of Representatives last night approved an amendment offered by Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore) to the Fiscal Year 2004 Agriculture Appropriations bill to improve enforcement of animal fighting bans under the federal Animal Welfare Act. Blumenauer argued that the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has pursued only a handful of cases in the 27 years since Congress first prohibited most interstate and foreign commerce in animals for fighting, despite receiving numerous tips from informants and requests for assistance from local police on illegal trafficking of fighting dogs and birds.

“We’ve had laws on the books prohibiting these inhumane activities for years,” Blumenauer said. “It’s time to ensure that USDA has the resources it needs to combat this continuing problem.”

Blumenauer’s amendment provides \$800,000 for the Office of Inspector General, the chief law enforcement arm of the USDA, to focus on animal fighting cases. Last year, Blumenauer secured provisions in the Farm Bill to close loopholes in the federal animal fighting law, however, enforcement of the law has been sporadic. Blumenauer hopes that increased resources for the OIG office will improve enforcement.

Dogfighting is banned in all 50 states and cockfighting is banned in 48 states. Dogfights and cockfights involve not only intense animal abuse, but also tends to be associated with other illegal activities such as gambling, drug trafficking and violence to people. Additionally, cockfighting may lead to the spreading of diseases such as Exotic Newcastle Disease (END), a highly contagious viral disease that affects the respiratory, digestive, and nervous systems of all birds.

Blumenauer’s amendment to the Fiscal Year 2004 Agriculture Appropriations bill was approved by a vote of 222-179. The legislation must now be approved by the United States Senate and signed into law by the President.