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CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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Legislation to Aid Prisoners and Retired Race Horses

SACRAMENTO, CA – A bill to promote second careers for retired race horses while providing vocational training to offenders in California correctional facilities is working its way through the legislative process in Sacramento.

SB 1523, authored by Senator Tony Strickland, was approved unanimously April 24 by the Senate Committee on Governmental Organization and now advances to the Senate Appropriations Committee. The bill would establish a fund for California retired race horses to provide for their rehabilitation and training. This program would be based at California correctional facilities and staffed by offenders as part of their rehabilitation and vocational training. Funding would come from the California horse racing industry with money collected from penalties and fines imposed on licensees and from fees paid to the CHRB for occupational licenses. In Fiscal Year 2010-11, these funds totaled \$1,145,841.

The legislation would require the CHRB to implement the program in partnership with a nonprofit organization that operates rehabilitation and retirement facilities in the state for the care of retired California race horses. This nonprofit organization would likely be the California Retirement Management Account (CARMA), a charitable organization that raises money for California racehorses. The CHRB adopted a rule in 2008 naming CARMA to oversee the expenditure of a portion of purse revenues to help fund these charitable efforts.

Modeled after existing programs already established in several other states, this California program would involve the selection of perhaps 100 horses each year from the large pool of horses that no longer can compete in races. The horses would be selected for the program based on their health, personalities, and other criteria making them suitable candidates for second careers in dressage, cross country, show jumping, western events, and pleasure riding. The program would contract with a horse handler, or wrangler, whose responsibilities would include participation in this selection process. Volunteers from the various riding disciplines could also help with this process.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) would select the offenders to participate in the program. Experience with horses would not be a prerequisite. In conversations with program administrators in others states where similar programs are in place, including Kentucky, Virginia, South Carolina, and Indiana, members of the CHRB staff have learned that some inmates in those programs have gone on to work as blacksmiths, grooms, and other backstretch occupations following their release.

The wrangler would oversee all training activities at each of the California correctional facilities selected for the program. In addition to compensating the wrangler, the more significant program costs

would be for the construction of suitable facilities (e.g. paddocks, riding pens, wash racks, etc.) at the selected correctional facilities, the care and feeding of the horses, and the salaries of correctional officers assigned to guard the offenders participating in the program. The CHRB would enter into a contract with CDCR for these purposes. Members of the CHRB staff already have met with senior administrators at CDCR to discuss these matters.

While funding for the program would not be in place before January 1, 2013, if the legislation is passed and signed by the Governor, preparations could begin before that date, such as site selection, participant selection, and interviewing applicants for the wrangler position.

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