



Animal Welfare Institute

900 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20003

June 17, 2019

Councilmember Mark Levine, Chair
Committee on Health
New York City Council
250 Broadway, Committee Room, 14th Floor
New York, NY 10007

RE: Support for Intro 1425 – the Carriage Horse Heat Relief Bill

Dear Chairman Levine:

On behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute and our supporters in New York City, we respectfully submit this testimony in support of Intro 1425, the Carriage Horse Heat Relief Bill. We appreciate your consideration of this bill before your committee and hope that it can expeditiously become law.

Intro 1425, sponsored by Council Member Keith Powers, would make it unlawful to work carriage horses whenever the head index reaches or exceeds 90 degrees Fahrenheit. As you know, this bill has tremendously broad support in the New York City Council, with 19 members in addition to the lead sponsor and yourself cosponsoring Intro 1425. We are gratified the Council has opted to take a close look at how it can directly and meaningfully improve the welfare of the horses that pull horse-drawn carriages in New York City.

Numerous other cities in the United States have set clear maximum temperature limits so that horses are not subjected to extreme heat that could adversely affect their health. Setting a maximum based on heat index offers a commonsense approach to ensure that the rules and regulations governing this industry take into account an accurate reflection of how hot it feels outside – e.g., preventing horses from being overworked in extreme humidity.

AWI strongly supports increased protections for horses that would ultimately reduce any suffering or discomfort they might endure while working in congested urban areas. New York City, like many densely populated locales, can suffer from the “heat island” effect whereby urban landscapes become markedly hotter than nearby and comparatively rural settings due to the development of buildings, roads, and other infrastructure that replace open land and vegetation. Exposed hard surfaces made from asphalt and concrete in particular can become hotter than the surrounding air temperature. In a letter to the City Council and then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Holly Cheever, D.V.M., noted that New York City’s asphalt surfaces are capable of reaching temperatures as high as 200 degrees Fahrenheit, underscoring the urgent need to take proactive measures to keep horses sufficiently cool in such environments.

Dr. Cheever added, “In the critical temperature range of 89 to 96 degrees Fahrenheit, a large horse, particularly one of the draft breeds, is greatly challenged in its ability to dissipate its body heat into an increasingly warm environment, especially if high humidity is a factor...If the horse is dehydrated and cannot produce sweat, anhydrosis ensues and can be life-threatening.”

Not surprisingly, horses pulling 1,000-pound carriages in high heat require much greater water volumes (15–20 gallons), as they may lose over 10 gallons from evaporation. This much water is difficult to provide in the urban setting, even when water troughs are available. While not a perfect solution, Intro 1425 is critically necessary to prevent horses from being worked during heatwaves – an untenable situation that not only endangers the animals themselves, but also the passengers who ride in the carriages and others who share the road with these vehicles given the higher risk of the horses collapsing.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter that will better protect the health and well-being of carriage horses in the city. We hope that Intro 1425 will pass the full New York City Council in the near future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JG', is positioned below the word 'Sincerely,'.

Joanna Grossman
Equine Program Manager
Animal Welfare Institute