

# Comes a Horse Lawyer

Why Andrew J. Turro helps clients in the horse racing industry BY DAVID LEVINE

"I had no idea it was going to take me down this path," says Andrew J. Turro, an animal law attorney who heads his firm's Equine and Racing Law practice.

Growing up, Turro says he was merely a casual fan of horse racing. "I would follow the Triple Crown," he says, but "I rarely went to the track, no more than once or twice as a kid." He wouldn't have been able to tell you the difference between, say, standardbred and thoroughbred racing. For the record: The former is where horses pull a cart driven by a jockey while the latter is the better-known, jockey-on-a-horse kind.

Then horse racing found him.

About 20 years ago, the Standardbred Owners Association came to his firm, Meyer, Suozzi, English & Klein, looking to address proposed state legislation that would reclassify certain backstretch workers. When no one else in the firm volunteered, Turro, experienced in employment law, stepped up. "Sounds like an interesting case," he remembers thinking.

"The proposed legislation sought to classify workers traditionally deemed independent contractors hired by trainers—such as blacksmiths and veterinarians—as *employees* of trainers," says Turro. He adds that "backstretch workers," such as grooms and hot walkers, who typically work for a single trainer, are properly classified as that trainer's employee. Vets and blacksmiths, on the other hand, often do work with horses from many different trainers.

The legislation, he believes, would have been "very detrimental to trainers, would have great financial effect on them." Turro presented the SOA's position. Eventually the legislation failed.

That work led to a major case involving the gaming commission's intention to promulgate laws around drug testing horses out of competition. "There were all kinds of problems with that, including several constitutional issues," he says. "We challenged it, and over the next three or four years litigated the case up to the New York Court of Appeals, challenging its constitutionality." That challenge was successful in the Supreme Court, partially reversed in the appellate division, and by the time it got to the Court of Appeals, Turro says, "the gaming commission had changed the law in such a way that many of our objections were taken care of."



**Andrew J. Turro**  
Meyer, Suozzi,  
English & Klein;  
Animal Law;  
Garden City

From there, he took on other cases, repping both associations (standardbred and thoroughbred), as well as individual owners, trainers and jockeys.

"It has become a very active part of my practice," he says.

Perhaps his biggest case involved client

Linda Rice, whom he calls "the preeminent female trainer in North America," and who, in 2019, was charged with improper conduct, including receiving privileged information and bribes. Though law enforcement investigated and declined to prosecute, the gaming commission decided to go forward. "They wanted a revocation of her license," he says. "We fought tooth and nail."

In 2021, after many hearings the year before, the commission issued a three-year revocation and fine. A temporary restraining order held the punishments while Turro appealed to the Third Judicial Department of the state appellate division. Instead of the commission revoking her license, it rescinded its suspension and merely imposed a fine. "She never missed a day of training over seven years," Turro says. "It's a pretty nice victory."

He's also represented trainers charged with medication violations. "People have misconceptions that anything used in horses is to enhance performance," Turro says. "Most are to keep the horses healthy. They are athletes. Yes, there are prohibited substances, but in these cases that was not at issue. In my 20 years in horse racing, a lot of medications being prosecuted for are therapeutic meds recognized

by the gaming commission. The public often has the misconception that the use of illegal drugs is rampant, but—with respect to my clients—that is simply not the case."

It's the passion his clients have for the sport and the animals that most appeals to Turro about the work.

"These people love what they do," he says. "Many have been horsemen or horsewomen since they were barely adults—or they grew up with horses. They have a love for the racing game, a love for the horses. To be surrounded by people who love what they do and are good at it is inspiring. That first case, totally serendipitous, was an employment matter, but from that day I have really liked the people I was dealing with. Their passion is contagious. I want to help preserve that." SL



## No Inside Information Here

Turro knows his strengths. The law? Yes. Playing the ponies? Not so much. "I never ask for tips, and I don't get tips," he says. "My clients know I don't bet more than \$2—just for fun. I'm not good at it."