

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 24, 2021

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
The Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
The Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

As you begin the process of crafting the Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we strongly urge you to allocate no less than \$11 million in dedicated funding for the implementation of humane, proven, and reversible immunocontraceptive vaccines in order to support the humane and sustainable management of wild horses and burros on our public lands. Our federally protected wild horses and burros are symbols of American freedom, and the American public overwhelmingly supports their humane management and protection from harm. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) must begin to robustly implement proven and scientifically supported fertility control to ensure a humane, effective, and sustainable management strategy.

We appreciate your Committee's effort to support the BLM's horse and burro program in FY2021 by providing more than \$14 million in additional funding over previously enacted levels. We also appreciate your efforts to promote agency accountability, requiring that the BLM submit a report to Congress detailing past expenditures and accounting for future program planning and needs. However, we remain concerned about the BLM's management of equine populations as the agency continues to utilize increased funding to conduct management techniques such as roundups and removals—an approach that has proven ineffective at curbing population growth.

As a result of the BLM's mass roundup strategy and removal mismanagement, there are approximately 51,000 animals in short- and long-term holding; this number will only increase if the BLM continues to rely primarily on a failed system of mass removals. The National Academy of Sciences has noted that the BLM's efforts to remove horses from the range without administering fertility control actually *increase* population growth rates on the range through compensatory reproduction, thereby perpetuating an unsustainable cycle. What's more, the roundups themselves pose serious welfare risks to wild horses, with injuries and fatalities occurring regularly during these operations.

Horses and burros removed from the range are also ending up in the slaughter pipeline at an alarming rate, as shown in a recent *New York Times* exposé – an unacceptable outcome that not

only contravenes congressional directives meant to protect wild horses from slaughter, but a problem that will likely be exacerbated if the BLM continues to shift these animals into off-range holding facilities.

The BLM's focus on roundups comes at a significant cost to taxpayers – roughly \$48,000 per horse for removal and holding, according to the agency's data. The BLM's recent plan to Congress calls for accelerated roundups and is expected to cost nearly a billion dollars over the next five years alone. However, there is a more effective alternative that would allow for both cost-savings and humane management. Instead of accelerating removals and stockpiling horses in permanent holding facilities, the BLM should be directed to implement a robust and humane fertility control strategy with reversible immunocontraceptives such as porcine zona pellucida (PZP) vaccines. Compared to removals, this offers a much more cost-effective method; PZP costs approximately \$30 a dose and, most importantly, is available now and proven to work. Thirty years of research demonstrates the effectiveness of PZP and the National Academy of Sciences noted it as the most effective way to manage wild horse populations.

Importantly, inclusion of this language would entail no additional funding; rather, it would ensure that a portion of the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro program budget is used to implement effective and humane fertility control. We additionally ask that you include report language that requires the BLM to report back to the Committee within 12 months of enactment of the implementation plan with interim results and details of its fertility control program to ensure accountability and transparency. Moreover, we urge you to support private/public partnerships, which have been implemented on a small scale but could be expanded. Finally, given safety concerns expressed by numerous Members of Congress, we urge you to specify that funds cannot be used to perform risky and inhumane ovariectomy procedures on wild horses.

We thank you for your consideration and would appreciate the opportunity to work with you as you consider this issue in the Fiscal Year 2022 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies bill.

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/

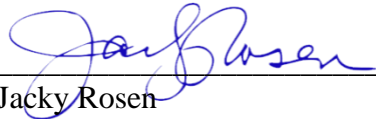
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

/s/

Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



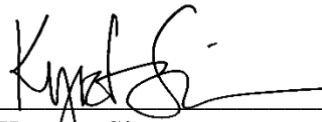
Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator