

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
Senator Thomas Umberg, Chair
2025-2026 Regular Session

AB 928 (Rogers)
Version: June 2, 2026
Hearing Date: June 23, 2026
Fiscal: Yes
Urgency: No
AM

SUBJECT

Roosters: restrictions

DIGEST

This bill prohibits a person, on and after January 1, 2028, from keeping more than 25 roosters that are movement constrained through the use of an enclosure or tether and makes a violation subject to a civil penalty of \$2,500 for each violation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This bill is set to be heard in the Senate Business, Professions and Economic Development Committee the day before it is set to be heard in this Committee. As such, this analysis was completed before the bill was heard in the Senate Business, Professions and Economic Development Committee. The bill will only be heard in this Committee if it passes the Senate Business, Professions and Economic Development Committee.

This bill is intended to help the state in combatting illegal cockfighting by seeking to prohibit gamefowl yards. To achieve this goal, the bill prohibits a person, on and after January 1, 2028, from keeping more than 25 roosters that are movement constrained through the use of an enclosure or tether and makes a violation subject to a civil penalty of \$2,500. Each day a rooster is kept in violation of the bill will constitute a separate and distinct violation. The bill contains several exceptions and provides a 14-day period after notice of violation to rehome or surrender birds over the prescribed limit.

This bill is sponsored by the Humane World for Animals (formerly called the Human Society of the United States). It is supported by a number of animal rights organizations, including the Animal Legal Defense Fund and the San Diego Humane Society. The bill is opposed by an array of organizations that represent immigrant communities, farmworkers, low-income individuals, advocates for gamefowl owners, and 6 individuals.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE LAW

Existing federal law prohibits hosting or attending an animal fighting venture, as well as knowingly selling, buying, possessing, training, transporting, delivering, or receiving any animal for the purpose of having the animal participate in an animal fighting venture. (7 U.S.C. § 1256(a)-(b).)

Existing state law:

- 1) Makes any person who, for amusement or gain, causes any cock to fight with another cock or with a different kind of animal or creature or with any human being, or injures any cock or causes the cock to injure another animal, or allows it to happen on their property, or aids or abets in the fighting of an animal, guilty of a misdemeanor. (Pen. Code § 597b (b).)
- 2) Regulates the production of poultry, eggs, and egg products. (Food & Ag. Code § 25401 et seq.)
- 3) Makes any building or property used for the purpose of willfully conducting cockfighting in violation of Penal Code section 597b a public nuisance. (Civ. Code § 3482.8.)

This bill:

- 1) Prohibits a person, on and after January 1, 2028, from keeping more than 25 roosters that are movement constrained through the use of an enclosure or tether.
- 2) Defines the following terms for purposes of the bill.
 - a) "Enclosure" means a structure used for confinement, including a wire cage or item traditionally used for another purpose such as a water tank or plastic barrel that meets both of the following criteria:
 - i. is used to provide long-term housing for one rooster; and
 - ii. prevents physical contact with other roosters.
 - b) "Gamefowl rooster" means a rooster of a breed of domestic fowl chiefly developed or maintained for the purpose of producing fighting cocks, including, but not limited to, all of the following breeds:
 - i. American Gamefowl;
 - ii. Asil; and
 - iii. other breeds or crossbreeds of rooster intended or used for fighting.
 - c) "Rooster" means a male chicken that meets all of the following criteria:
 - i. is six months of age or older;
 - ii. has full adult plumage;
 - iii. is capable of crowing; and
 - iv. is not a bantam chicken.

- 3) The prohibition in 1) does not apply to any of the persons or entities listed below.
 - a) A person who keeps or raises roosters for purposes of food production if the person is subject to local, state, or federal inspection laws or regulations.
 - b) A public or private school registered with the State Department of Education.
 - c) A government-operated animal shelter.
 - d) A nonprofit animal welfare organization, as defined in Section 6010.40 of the Revenue and Taxation Code.
 - e) A 4-H, Future Farmers of America (FFA), or Grange project, if the 4-H, FFA, or Grange has provided written approval for the project to the person keeping or raising the roosters.
 - f) A person who meets all of the following criteria:
 - i. owns and breeds poultry for the purpose of lawful exhibition in accordance with accepted poultry raising practices and all laws and regulations governing exhibition;
 - ii. within the preceding 10 years, has not been convicted for any cockfighting offenses in this state, by the federal government, or in any other state; and
 - iii. does not possess more than 25 gamefowl roosters.
- 4) Provides that a person who violates these provisions shall be liable for a civil penalty, not to exceed \$2,500 for each violation, which shall be assessed and recovered in a civil action brought in the name of the people of the State of California by the Attorney General, a county counsel, a city attorney, or a city prosecutor in this state in a court of competent jurisdiction.
 - a) Civil penalties collected pursuant to this chapter shall be paid to the county in which the action was brought.
 - b) Each day a rooster is kept in violation of this part shall constitute a separate and distinct violation.
 - c) Before a civil action is brought, where public safety is not at risk, a written notice of violation shall be provided granting a minimum of 14 days to correct the violation and to rehome or relinquish the roosters.
- 5) Provides that a city or county is not prevented from adopting or enforcing ordinances on the keeping of roosters that are more restrictive than the requirements in the bill.
- 6) Provides that the bill does not limit or affect the application or enforcement of any other law that protects animals.

COMMENTS

1. Stated need for the bill

The author writes:

Cockfighting is a criminal industry that profits from severe animal cruelty and often occurs alongside other unlawful activities. Although cockfighting is illegal in every state and under federal law, it continues to be a widespread criminal industry across the country, especially in California. An integral and lucrative part of this industry is the trafficking of fighting birds from gamefowl yards where hundreds (or thousands) of roosters are bred and sold for fighting. These birds are raised outside with minimal shelter, kept in inhumane conditions meant to heighten their aggressive behaviors, and sold for hundreds or thousands of dollars per bird. Illegally trafficked fighting birds are also a threat to the poultry industry and public health given the current and potential impacts of avian flu and other avian diseases. Law enforcement needs more tools to address the prevalence of cockfighting and related activities.

AB 928 empowers law enforcement to proactively address this issue by establishing civil liability for those who traffic birds for fighting. The provisions of this bill won't interfere with commercial poultry operations, poultry hobbyists, schools, animal agencies, and FFA and 4H projects. California must continue to lead the fight on animal cruelty and provide law enforcement with effective deterrents, like civil penalties, to stop illegal cockfighting and bird trafficking operations. Modeled after existing California county ordinances, this bill will safeguard local communities from the cruelty, noise, avian disease, and criminal activities linked to cockfighting.

2. This bill seeks to curb illegal cockfighting in the state by addressing the issue of gamefowl yards

Cockfighting has been illegal in California for over 100 years and is considered a form of animal cruelty. Section 597b of the Penal Code makes cockfighting a misdemeanor, and the Legislature has considered and approved a number of bills in recent years to strengthen the prohibition. Regardless, cockfighting continues to occur in this state, including the breeding and selling of roosters. These roosters are kept in small enclosures or tethered so they have little movement and are separated from other animals.

In 2022, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General (USDA-OIG) conducted an investigation that resulted in the arrest and sentencing of Joseph D. Sanford, a 74 year-old from Ceres, California known as "Chicken Joe." Sanford owned and operated Joe Sanford Gamefarm in Ceres where USDA-OIG found 2,956 game

fowl.¹ Two years later, the L.A. Times reported that the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) had concluded an investigation into a cockfighting enterprise in San Bernardino County where more than 100 people would regularly gather at a single home to gamble on roosters that “were made to fight – sometimes to the death – in an arena while wearing sharp blades known as ‘gaffs’ on their legs.”² In addition to the price the hosts charged to attend the fights, handlers were also charged \$1,000 to enter four roosters into the fight. Gamefowl yards can also pose a significant risk to the spread of avian diseases as they are often tethered outside without protection from wild birds, transported across the country without oversight or vaccinations, and exposed to the blood of other birds.

This bill seeks to provide further deterrence to illegal cockfighting in this state by addressing gamefowl yards. The bill prohibits, beginning on and after January 1, 2028, a person from keeping more than 25 roosters that are movement constrained through the use of an enclosure or tether. There is no limit on roosters kept by a person if they are not movement constrained or tethered. There are several exceptions in the bill, including for:

- a person who keeps or raises roosters for purposes of food production if the person is subject to local, state, or federal inspection laws or regulations;
- a public or private school registered with the State Department of Education;
- a government-operated animal shelter;
- a nonprofit animal welfare organization;
- A 4-H, Future Farmers of America (FFA), or Grange project, if the 4-H, FFA, or Grange has provided written approval for the project to the person keeping or raising the roosters.

Additionally, there is an exception for a person who: owns and breeds poultry for the purpose of lawful exhibition in accordance with accepted poultry raising practices and all laws and regulations governing exhibition; who has not been convicted for any cockfighting offense within the past 10 years; and who does not possess more than 25 gamefowl roosters.

The sponsor of the bill, Humane World for Animals, writes:

The 25-rooster threshold in this bill factors in precedent from existing local ordinances. The number reflects a well-documented operational scale within the industry, and provides a clear, enforceable standard for intervention. Importantly,

¹ U. S. Attorney’s Off. Eastern Dis. of Cal., “Chicken Joe” Sentenced to 16 Months in Prison for Conspiring to Run an Animal Fighting Operation, (April 29, 2022), available at: <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edca/pr/chicken-joe-sentenced-16-months-prison-conspiring-run-animal-fighting-operation>.

² Mejia, L.A. Times, *Cockfights, tacos, federal charges: FBI says San Bernardino property hosted animal fights*, (August 5, 2024), available at <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-08-05/cockfights-tacos-fbi-san-bernardino-property-hosted-animal-fights>.

the legislation also includes explicit exemptions for anyone who has more than 25 roosters for legitimate reasons, including commercial poultry operations, poultry hobbyists, schools, animal agencies, and FFA and 4H projects. The bill's language is the culmination of many conversations with experts and is carefully crafted to ensure that it targets cockfighting practices and does not impact legitimate agricultural, educational, or hobby poultry activities. [...]

This bill is modeled after the more than a dozen local ordinances that have proven to be effective in reducing illegal gamefowl trafficking operations and were put in effect to address residents' concerns regarding excessive noise, cockfighting reports, and inhumane conditions. These include the counties of Contra Costa, Los Angeles, Merced, Monterey, Napa, Riverside, Santa Barbara, San Bernardino, Santa Clara, San Diego, San Francisco, Solano, and Ventura. Many other localities have considered adopting similar ordinances, including, most recently, Fresno and Sacramento counties. While many counties have adopted local ordinances, enforcement gaps remain because illegal operators

Under the bill, a person who violates its provisions is liable for a civil penalty, not to exceed \$2,500 for each violation. The penalty is to be assessed and recovered in a civil action brought in the name of the people of the State of California by the Attorney General, a county counsel, a city attorney, or a city prosecutor in this state in a court of competent jurisdiction. Any civil penalties collected are to be paid to the county in which the action was brought. Each day a rooster is kept in violation of the bill constitutes a separate and distinct violation. In response to opposition concerns that the bill could have a disparate impact on immigrant communities and constitute an increased risk of unwarranted law enforcement scrutiny as a result of enforcement, the author amended the bill to provide a 14-day period to cure a violation by rehoming or relinquishing the roosters when public safety is not at risk. It does not seem that this amendment has addressed the concerns of the opposition.

3. Stakeholder statements

A large coalition of animal rights organizations write in support stating:

Although the activity is illegal in every state and under federal law, cockfighting continues to be widespread throughout the US, and particularly in California. In fact, the USDA has estimated that cockfighting is a multi-million-dollar criminal industry in our state that involves more than 3 million birds. The three largest seizures of fighting birds in US history have all been in California. Just last week, thousands of birds related to a cockfighting investigation were seized in Sonoma County.

Cockfighting is a barbaric and inexcusable illicit trade that profits from animal cruelty. It involves pitting two roosters with metal weapons attached to their legs to

fight to the death for the spectators' entertainment. It is also often associated with other criminal activities such as drug trafficking, gang activity, and illegal weapon sales.

From the standpoint of animal control and law enforcement authorities, gamefowl operations unequivocally perpetuate animal cruelty, linked criminal enterprises, and significant public health hazards, while undermining community standards and livability. This results in agencies frequently responding to intervene in persistent neighbor disputes over incessant noise from crowing roosters, demonstrable declines in property values, and a deterioration in residents' quality of life.

A coalition of organizations that represent immigrant communities, farmworkers, and low-income individuals writes in opposition stating:

[...] AB 928 inadvertently creates a 'court pipeline' where undocumented individuals must appear in public records and before judicial officers to defend their livelihoods, effectively exposing them to heightened surveillance and the risk of immigration-related arrests and raids. The federal government has been actively working to access data from state agencies and local municipalities to conduct arrests of immigrants. Some conservative local jurisdictions want to provide data regardless of state law prohibiting such data sharing. Permanent residents that are cited on AB 928 now have a record that will negatively impact their immigration status which will result in losing their permanent residency or not being able to become citizens.

AB 928 lacks sufficient safeguards to prevent discriminatory enforcement or to mitigate the adverse effect it would have on immigrant households. Without clear limits on enforcement authority, robust due-process protections, and alternatives to punitive penalties, the bill risks functioning less as an animal welfare measure and more as a vehicle for unnecessary and harmful enforcement on immigrant communities. We cannot ignore that increased judicial contact over culturally specific practices serves as a gateway for federal immigration agents to track and apprehend our neighbors. At a time when raids and courthouse arrests are on the rise, California should be closing doors to unnecessary enforcement, not opening new ones through civil poultry codes. We do not need another law that will result in not only financial hardships but also criminal prosecutions. [...]

Other opposition, such as the Pacific Poultry Breeders Association and the Southern California Poultry Club, write in opposition to the bill asserting it will affect legitimate hobbyists and other poultry breeders whose practices will now be considered suspect under the bill's provisions and open them to liability.

The Southern California Poultry Club writes in opposition:

AB 928 will not stop cockfighting activities, which are already illegal in California, and will only serve to turn legal rooster owners into criminals for no reason other than for the number of birds they have on their property. Our club hosts a large show every year in Riverside County, which includes a category specifically for gamebirds. The exceptions in the bill are highly insufficient and do NOT protect our members.

SUPPORT

Actors and Others for Animals
American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Animal Resource Center of the Inland Empire
Berkeley-East Bay Humane Society
Butte County Animal Control
Calaveras County Animal Services
California Agricultural Commissioners & Sealers Association
California Animal Welfare Association
Central California SPCA
City of Norco Animal Control Shelter
City of Rancho Mirage
City of San Bernardino
Cleaneearth4kids.org
County of Monterey
County of Sacramento
County of San Luis Obispo, Animal Services Division
County of Santa Barbara
East Bay SPCA
Fresno County Sheriff's Office
Fresno Humane Animal Services
Friends of Colusa County Animal Shelter
Friends of the Alameda Animal Shelter
Hawaiian Humane Society
Health and Humane Agency Services, El Dorado County
Humane Society for Inland Mendocino County
Humane Society of Imperial County
Humane Society of San Bernardino Valley
Humane Society of Ventura County
Humane Veterinary Medical Alliance (HUMANEVMA)
Humane World for Animals
Inland Valley Humane Society & SPCA
Kern County Animal Services

Lompoc
Long Beach Animal Care Services
Marin Humane
National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations
National Animal Care & Control Association
Oakland Animal Services
Palo Alto Humane Society
Pasadena Humane
Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA
Pets in Need
Public Interest Coalition
Ridgecrest Animal Services
Ridgecrest Animal Shelter
San Diego Humane
San Diego Humane Society
San Diego Humane Society and SPCA
San Francisco SPCA
Santa Barbara County Animal Services
Santa Barbara Humane
Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter
Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter Foundation
Social Compassion in Legislation
Sonoma County Animal Services
Southeast Area Animal Control Authority
Stray Cat Alliance
Sutter Animal Services Authority
Town of Apple Valley Animal Services

OPPOSITION

American Bantam Association District 15
Asian Law Alliance
California Association for the Preservation of Gamefowl
California Hmong Chamber of Commerce
California Human Development
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation
Center for Employment Training
Central Valley Opportunity Center (CVOC)
Comite De Accion Del Valle (CAV)
First Day Foundation
Friends of Animals
Gold Coast Poultry Fanciers
Greater California Society of Poultry Fanciers
Hen Harbor

Hermandad Mexicana Nacional
Humane Farming Association
Humboldt Poultry Fanciers Association
Immigola
Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice
LA Cooperativa Campesina De California
Los Amigos De LA Comunidad, INC.
Mothers of East Los Angeles
Nate's Chicks
Pacific Poultry Breeders Association
Proteus INC.
Proteus, INC.
Rooster Sanctuary at Danzig's Roost
Social Equity Los Angeles
Southern California Poultry Club LLC
Wonder Wood Ranch
X-Cityfeed
6 individuals

PRIOR VOTES

Assembly Floor (Ayes 46, Noes 15)
Assembly Appropriations Committee (Ayes 9, Noes 2)
Assembly Judiciary Committee (Ayes 10, Noes 1)
Assembly Agriculture Committee (Ayes 6, Noes 1)
