



**Agriculture and New York State Horse Breeding Development Fund
DRAFT Minutes – September 23, 2025**

ITEM 1: CALL TO ORDER – Chairman Brian O’Dwyer called the meeting to order at approximately 2:04 p.m. Establishment of a quorum was noted by Chairman O’Dwyer. In attendance were Fund Board Members Richard Ball, Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Markets, and Steve Jones. Chairman O’Dwyer noted the presence of Executive Director Ralph Scunziano and Elizabeth Wolters, Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

ITEM 2: CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES OF APRIL 10, 2025 – The Fund considered previously circulated draft minutes of the meeting conducted on April 10, 2025. The minutes were accepted as circulated.

ITEM 3: 4-H PRESENTATION – In 2023, pursuant to Section 332(1)(b) of the Racing, Pari-Mutuel Wagering and Breeding Law, the Fund contributed to the 4-H standardbred development program. These contributions are crucial in fulfilling the Fund’s legislative mission. Representatives of the NYS 4-H Horse Program and Cornell Cooperative Extension were invited to make a presentation regarding the status of their programs. Brianna Hughes, NYS Equine Youth Specialist, spoke to the Members about the expansion of programs this past year and plans for the upcoming year.

A grant of \$200,000 to the 4-H was approved for 2025.

ON A MOTION BY: Commissioner Ball - APPROVED: 3-0

ITEM 4: 2025 GRANT REQUESTS – Pursuant to Section 332(1)(i) of the Racing, Pari-Mutuel Wagering and Breeding Law, qualified organizations were encouraged apply for grant funding. The Fund received five proposals totaling \$299,621. Staff reviewed and determined that the five grant proposals meet the statutory requirements for funding.

Goshen Historic Track: George Casale from the Goshen Historic track presented the request for a grant in the amount of \$100,000 for 2025. The proposed funds would be used for reconstruction of the grandstand, bandstand, and judges’ booth. Under Section 332(1)(i) of the Racing, Pari-Mutuel Wagering and Breeding Law, the Fund is authorized to provide such funding in “maintaining a historic racetrack that is designated as a national registered historic landmark.” This grant proposal meets that standard.

SUNY Morrisville Therapy and Technology Equipment Project: Mike Mazza from Morrisville College Foundation presented a request for a grant in the amount of \$120,121. The funding requested by the Morrisville College Foundation provides for the expansion of its Standardbred breeding program. This grant is necessary to continue providing education for future equine breeding professionals and to help strengthen the industry in New York State,

which fulfills the Fund's goal of investing in equine research and education. Under Section 332(1)(i), the Fund is authorized to distribute monies received by it to support "educational programming." This grant proposal meets that standard.

Harness Racing Museum and Hall of Fame: Harness Racing Museum and Hall of Fame, requested a grant for \$60,000 for 2025. The Museum notes that the significant financial support of this Fund continues to be critical to the Museum's efforts to educate the public about harness racing history and the sport. These funds provide the means for adequate personnel support and marketing as well as upgrading equipment, purchasing educational craft supplies and other department expenses. Under Section 332(1)(i) of the Racing, Pari-Mutuel Wagering and Breeding Law, the Fund is authorized to distribute monies received by it "to support and promote research, educational programming, and the preservation of the history and traditions of harness and trotting horse racing through acquiring and maintaining collections of artifacts, memorabilia and documents related to such history." This grant proposal meets that standard.

Therapeutic Horses of Saratoga: Therapeutic Horses of Saratoga requested a grant in the amount of \$12,000. This proposal seeks funding to support the implementation and expansion of its "Harnessing Hope" program. The program is aimed at enriching the lives of low-income children and youth by providing them with unique opportunities to engage with horses while learning about standardbred racing aftercare and career possibilities within the harness racing industry. Under Section 332(1)(i), the Fund is authorized to distribute monies received by it to support "educational programming." This grant proposal meets that standard.

Harness Horse Youth Foundation: The HHYF has developed Activity Workbooks featuring harness racing-specific material for educational use. HHYF is seeking \$7,500 to create video content to accompany each section of the workbook. These videos will enhance the overall impact of the resource by making the material more engaging and accessible to broader audiences of all ages. HHYF has been collaborating with 4-H, who has purchased 55 copies of the Activity Workbooks. This provided the impetus for HHYF to pursue the video component. Under Section 332(1)(i), the Fund is authorized to distribute monies received by it to support "educational programming." This grant proposal meets that standard.

These five proposals total \$299,621, which is above the statutory limit for this year (\$273,236). The Board discussed funding all five at a prorated amount, which equals approximately 91% of each request.

ON A MOTION BY: Commissioner Ball - APPROVED: 2-0 (Trustee Jones – Abstained)

ITEM 5: REVIEW OF 2025 BUDGET, PROGRAM INCREASES, AND FINANCIAL UPDATE – Executive Director Scunzio stated that last year, the total additions to the program were ~\$2.47M. The Fund has enough capital reserves to continue to absorb these increases. It was suggested that those additions remain for another year. Also, it was suggested that the County Fair purses are increased to \$6,000 per race. Currently, the 2-year-old purses are \$3,500 and the 3-year-old purses are \$4,000. Increasing both to \$6,000 would put New York closer in line with other leading racing jurisdictions (Kentucky County Fair Races set a minimum of \$6,000 purses). The Fund will likely have an additional three County Fair races in 2026. The increase in purses would cost approximately \$500,000.

Giuseppe Carberg, Capitol Hill Management Services, presented the proposed 2026 Budget. Mr. Carberg noted estimated revenue of \$18 million, an additional \$720,000 of other income, and expenses of \$19.6 million, without the increases to the County Fair purses. Mr. Carberg also provided an update on the Fund's YTD financials.

The Breeder Awards were approved at the same level as 2024 (\$1,750,000).

ON A MOTION BY: Commissioner Ball - APPROVED: 2-0 (Trustee Jones – Abstained)

The 2026 Budget was approved, with the increase to the County Fair purses (to \$6,000).

ON A MOTION BY: Member Jones - APPROVED: 3-0

ITEM 6: STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK – At the Fund's April meeting, Executive Director Scunziano was asked to solicit feedback regarding the 2023 and 2024 legislative changes. Governor Kathy Hochul signed Assembly Bill A10028 (Pretlow) into law on September 29, 2023 (L. 2023, ch. 506), allowing for shipped semen, but stated in an accompanying approval memo that further legislative changes would be forthcoming in the next legislative session. Governor Kathy Hochul then signed Assembly Bill A8533 (Pretlow) into law on February 7, 2024 (L. 2024, ch. 39). With those further changes, eligibility for the County Fair and Excelsior Series were once again restricted to foals bred in NY State (to a NY stallion and a mare bred in NY State). Foals that are a product of shipped semen are only eligible for the Sire Stakes Series.

Executive Director Scunziano received correspondence from 11 sources, 10 of which were against the changes and received numerous phone calls. Many stated that they were unaware of the restrictions and cited other jurisdictions that do not impose such restrictions. Those that welcomed the changes stated that without the restrictions, the mares bred in NY will have a very difficult time getting bookings from NY stallions.

After discussions with stakeholders, it was suggested that for the foals of 2025 and 2026, a "consolation type" NY Sire Stakes racing series is implemented to address the issue:

1. The new series shall be comprised of 4 Legs and a final. It will be an open race series for "in state" as well as "out of state" conceived foals by New York Eligible sires. To be eligible a NY Sire Stakes yearling nomination payment must have been received by the Fund.
2. Points would be accrued by the participants. All legs and the final would compete on the same day as the Excelsior Legs/Final.
3. The entry Fee would be 2% of the purse with a suggested purse for each race of \$16,000 (80% of current Excelsior Leg). The purse for the final to be decided.
4. The series name shall be determined by the Ag Fund.

This will affect the 2027–29 Racing seasons. No board action is currently necessary. Trustee Jones stated that he does not agree with the legislative changes.

Additionally, Executive Director Scunziano received significant feedback about the 9-horse fields at ½ mile tracks. The decision was made on 11/27/23 to allow for a trailer when a race draws 9, 17, or 18 horses. This was an attempt to address the number of 4 and 5 horse fields, which are not conducive to betting. However, there was an overwhelming number of calls and emails received criticizing this action, specifically pertaining to the safety of 2-year-old horses. To make this change for next season and beyond, board action is necessary.

The conditions are amended to again restrict trailers in Sire Stakes and Excelsior races.

ON A MOTION BY: Member Jones - APPROVED: 3-0

ITEM 7: PUBLIC RELATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES CONTRACTS – December 31, 2025, will be the end of the initial terms for both the Advertising and Public Relation Services and Equine Program Administrative Services contracts. Each have the option for two, one-year renewals. The Public Relation services contract has increased by \$3,000 each year of the term (145k, 148k, 151k). Recommendation is to extend for one year with an increase to \$154,000. The Administrative contract has been fixed at \$272k/year. Recommendation is to extend for 1 year with a 3% increase. The extension of these contracts requires Board approval.

One-year extensions for the Advertising and Public Relations Services and Equine Program Administrative Services contracts were approved.

ON A MOTION BY: Commissioner Ball - APPROVED: 3-0

ITEM 8: NEW/OLD BUSINESS – There was no new or old business to discuss.

ITEM 9: MOTION TO ENTER INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION – Chairman O'Dwyer requested a motion to enter into Executive Session for the express purpose of consideration of matters pursuant to New York Public Officers Law Section 105(1)(f).

ON A MOTION BY: COMMISSIONER BALL - APPROVED: 3-0

Return from Executive Session. Chairman O'Dwyer concluded the Executive Session and had the record reflect that the Executive Session was limited to discussion pertaining to employment matters, as provided under Public Officers Law Section 105(1)(f).

ITEM 10: ADJOURNMENT: Chairman O'Dwyer declared the meeting adjourned at approximately 3:35 p.m.