



HUMANE ACTION Pittsburgh:

Statement on the Shrine Circus's Lawsuit Against the City of Pittsburgh

The ruling on the lawsuit challenging the ordinance banning instruments of pain (“bullhook ban”) allows for the Shrine Circus to perform in September without having to adhere to the “bullhook ban”. This ruling was based on honoring contracts in place prior to the ordinance passing in December 2017. While it is clear that the Shriners had a contract with PPG Paints Arena, nothing in the ordinance says they would have been prevented from honoring that contract – as long as specified training devices (bullhook, hacksaw, whip, etc.) were not used on the animals.

The Shriners claim that they cannot honor the PPG Paints contract without using these devices due to a mandate requiring them by their insurance policy, however their initial submission to the public record was an undated and unsigned policy. Their most recent submission is an insurance policy dated June 2018 – six months after the ordinance passed.

In exchange for allowing the Shriners not to adhere to the “bullhook ban”, they must allow for the circus animals to be monitored. We very much wished the court would have allowed the city’s initial suggested monitors to be used – a team with extensive experience in circus monitoring and jurisdiction to enforce state and federal laws that may be violated.

In the end, the monitors approved by the court were chosen by the Shriners – Dr. Brad Gordon from Iowa and Mr. Paul Reed. It is unknown to us whether Dr. Gordon has any experience monitoring circuses. Mr. Reed is a humane officer in Westmoreland County, therefore we do not believe he will have any jurisdiction in Allegheny County to enforce potential violations. We do not have any information as to what the monitoring will entail in terms of time commitment, videotaping, etc. This isn’t the outcome we had hoped for, but we respect the court’s ruling.

The Shriners have an additional component to their lawsuit to overturn the ordinance entirely. This is a huge waste of taxpayer dollars and the city law department’s resources. As it stands, the ordinance banning instruments of pain is just and constitutional. We expect the ordinance to stand.

After the Shriners’ September show, we anticipate animal circuses using such instruments will be a thing of the past and the Shriners will be remembered for being on the wrong side of history.

An open letter is being sent to Mr. Paul Leavy of the Shriners detailing proof of abuse and we are asking him to take animals out of the circus.

Dr. Brian Bonsteel
HAP President and Founder

Natalie Ahwesh
HAP Vice President