

# Support Senate Bill 358

Sponsor: Senator Carrie Hamblen

## The Equine Welfare Trust Fund

### THE PROBLEM: New Mexico's Equine Shelters Are At Capacity and Underfunded.

New Mexico's network of registered nonprofit equine shelters absorb vulnerable equines from a variety of sources, including owner-surrendered, stray, abandoned, and abused animals. But lack of funding limits the life-saving care and safe placement shelters can provide and increases the chances of horses being auctioned to kill buyers and entering the slaughter pipeline.

There are no government-run or government-funded equine shelters. Instead, the New Mexico Livestock Board (NMLB), the agency responsible for impounding abandoned equines and seizing those that have been cruelly treated, works with registered nonprofit shelters to absorb those animals. If not for these shelters, the horses, donkeys and mules acquired by the NMLB would remain the responsibility of the state, to either auction, otherwise place for care, or euthanize. In 2023, these shelters took in 191 equines, over half of which came from NMLB.

Nonprofit equine shelters, unlike cat and dog shelters, are not directly supported by state or municipal tax dollars. Instead, they rely on charitable donations, private grants, and to a lesser extent, occasional funding from the state's Equine Shelter Rescue Fund (ESRF). The ESRF, established in 2013 and currently administered by the NMLB, helps to cover some of the costs shelters incur in caring for the equines they take in from the NMLB. The ESRF has been funded with small annual tax checkoff donations and occasional one-time state legislative appropriations. *But the ESRF has never had a reliable, substantial funding stream.*

### THE SOLUTION: Establish An Equine Welfare Trust Fund to Earn Funding for the ESRF.

While New Mexico's nonprofit equine shelters struggle, state coffers are flush with record-breaking revenues. Senate Bill 358 would create an Equine Welfare Trust Fund by appropriating \$20 million, a small fraction of the current state budget surplus, into an investment fund that would grow over time. Earnings from the Equine Welfare Trust Fund, estimated at approximately \$500,000 annually within three years, would then flow into the ESRF. The bill would also move the administration of the ESRF from NMLB to the New Mexico Department of Agriculture.

Increased and sustainable funding is exactly what the ESRF needs in order to support capacity building across the network of nonprofit shelters that provide essential equine care services to our state.

Current equine sheltering and care needs are urgent and will only grow worse in coming years. Establishing the Equine Welfare Trust Fund is a responsible way to ensure necessary funding for our equines and the entities that care for them. *The time is now to establish funding that will grow with New Mexico's needs.*



## MORE ABOUT SB 358 – THE EQUINE WELFARE TRUST FUND

### What would New Mexico look like without equine shelters?

More starving, abused, and homeless equines, and increased numbers of horses being exported across the border for slaughter. Nonprofit equine shelters are the “go to” for horses, donkeys, and mules that the state has to impound or seize, which spares those equines from further suffering.

### How do New Mexico’s equine shelters normally get funded?

New Mexico’s nonprofit equine shelters are largely funded by the private sector through grants, foundations, donations. There is no certainty of funding for equine shelters from funding cycle to funding cycle, and in the past year, major funders have reduced the amount of funding granted to New Mexico’s equine rescues and shelters.

### Establishing the Equine Welfare Trust Fund will allow equine shelters to receive regular state funding in exchange for public services, including:

- providing shelter or placement for equines, based on capacity;
- contracting with or employing equine trainers;
- providing feed and pasture to maintain equines;
- providing for basic and emergency veterinary care or husbandry, including sterilization, fertility control or hoof care; and,
- administering adoption programs and services.

### Why do equine shelters need and deserve state funding?

Shelters are nonprofits who exist at the whim of private donors and grants—but they provide an important public service for the state, critical for public safety, land conservation, and community health. SB 358 would create a more reliable source of funding independent of private donors and unpredictable legislative appropriations. This is exactly the stability smaller nonprofits—especially those in rural and underserved communities—need most. Having predictable and consistent funding would allow shelters that receive ESRF funding better plan their budgets and expand their operations. Investing in the Equine Welfare Trust Fund (SB 358) now will create a safety net buffer for shelters and the state against economic downturns and better maintain these vital community services.

