

Grassroots Equestrian Group Brings SB25-149 to Colorado: A Step Toward Improving Equestrian Safety, Infrastructure, and Advocacy

In a major push for equestrian rights and safety, Community Equestrian, a grassroots equestrian group out of Jefferson County, Colorado, has successfully brought SB25-149 to the state's legislative floor with sponsorship from State Senator Lindsey Daugherty and State Representative Lisa Feret. This groundbreaking bill is set to improve equestrian infrastructure, enhance safety for riders, and give the equestrian community a stronger presence in Colorado's future development.

The Role of Community Equestrian

“Jefferson County is a case study in what happens to the equestrian ecosystem when metro growth expands into equestrian zones,” says Karen Hersh, President and co-founder of Community Equestrian. *“You have this situation where a lack of awareness and planning results in a deterioration of safety for the existing equestrian community, more people and more traffic coming into conflict with the horse community that has lived there for generations. People and horses are getting hurt and even killed. It doesn’t need to be this way, we can do better.”*

Hersh says Community Equestrian developed from a core group of local equestrians, many of whom were already serving on other local equine advocacy groups. Michele Hovet, Vice President and co-founder of Community Equestrian has a professional background in local government leadership and is uniquely qualified to navigate that environment. Hersh’s background in commercial real estate and development helps bring the developers perspective to the table. With a growing team bringing experience in land use and planning, communications and advocacy, Community Equestrian has been making progress on many issues in Jefferson County.

While Community Equestrian has taken a leadership role driving SB25-149, it’s really been the result of a collaboration of equine advocacy groups that have helped bring it together. *“The existing network of equestrian groups that represent different areas and interests in Colorado is vital to the success of our industry and community,”* says Hersh. *“We have partnered with the Jefferson County Horse Council and the Arvada Area Horseman’s Association throughout this process, they have been strong partners every step of the way.”*

Solutions Rooted in Equestrian Public Policy

“The issue of safety for equestrians in metro areas is really rooted in policy and planning,” says Hovet. *“Our engagement over the last year or so in Jefferson County has revealed that policy makers don’t really understand enough about us, they have no tools to see where we exist, or how to shape development in ways to address our safety.”* And this problem is not unique to Jefferson County Colorado. Colorado is one of the fastest growing states in the country. It is only a matter of time before the same problems repeat themselves in other communities across the state.

Colorado isn't alone either. From the Equine Land Conservation Resource website, *"According to the United States Department of Agriculture, the US is losing 6,000 acres of open land every day. Large open spaces and contiguous tracts of land are critical to providing the space we need to support our nation's equestrian heritage and economy. With the current rate of loss we may not have enough land to support our horses and equestrian-related activities in as little as 15 years."* The equestrian economy is a tremendously important economic driver across the US. The 2023 American Horse Council survey shows that the horse industry generates over 50 billion dollars into the US economy annually.

In Colorado, that annual contribution from all equestrian sectors combined is estimated to be more than 3.1 billion dollars annually, and supports over 24,000 jobs. With that economy being driven almost exclusively by small business and non-profit enterprises, it supports a vast network of recreation, tourism, competition, ranching and agriculture, youth and therapy programs, and an extensive ecosystem of industry that supports it. *"I think the time has come to recognize the significance of the horse industry in terms of its economic and social impact in our urban/suburban life,"* says Hersh, *"It's not just a romantic connection to our roots, it's fertile ground for cross-pollinating people from different perspectives, joined through a shared passion for these creatures and the experiences they offer. I'd like to see it remain accessible and safe for Colorado's growing population and for future generations."*

Making Equestrian Local Policy a Statewide Concern

The concept of improving equestrian public policy needs to be a statewide concern because growth brings these issues to bear over time to new places across the state. State Senator Lindsey Daugherty and State Representative Lisa Feret have worked with Community Equestrian and others in the community to sponsor legislation addressing these goals. SB25-149 was introduced in January into the Colorado legislative session. It is progressing through stakeholding and committee review in February and is expected to be ready for a vote in the Senate soon thereafter.

"This is an important piece of legislation for the equine community of Colorado and Boulder County Horse Association is in support!" Says Clare Tone, President of the Boulder County Horse Association.

What SB25-149 Aims to Achieve

SB25-149 is more than just a bill—it's a declaration of the contributions of the equestrian industry to the state of Colorado. Among its core goals:

- **Legislative Declaration:** The bill sets forth a set of declarations in support of the equestrian community and industry, recognizing its enormous economic contributions, its vital social contributions, and its connection to our western heritage.
- **Adopts the Pass Wide and Slow doctrine:** This rule will augment existing signage altering motorists in equestrian zones to slow to 10 mph and maintain 6 feet of clearance around equestrians when encountering them on roadways. This mirrors the biking law

enacted last year in Colorado that requires motorists maintain 3 feet of clearance around cyclists on roadways.

- **Identifies Equestrian Zones in communities and requires them to be identified on comprehensive master plans going forward:** As the metro area grows into areas where equestrian communities have existed for decades, we must do better integrating development with the existing communities where equestrian activity is prevalent. Too often the planning process progresses with little or no consideration for the adverse effects on safety for the existing community. Establishing an equestrian presence here will help promote our voice in the process. The comparatively moderate modifications needed to better address equestrian safety end up benefiting the pedestrian and cycling public as well, even minimizing conflict with motorists as a result for all groups.
- **Establishes Guidelines for Equestrian Indicators and Public Awareness and Education:** The bill sets forth new guidelines for road safety design in equestrian zones for street crossings, trailer parking near public trails and riding venues, and acceleration and deceleration lanes to more safely accommodate trailer traffic in and out of these areas. It establishes guidelines for signage that marks these equestrian accommodations and helps the public understand their purpose. And establishes standards for supplemental Pass Wide and Slow signage to be added to existing equestrian signage (the gold triangle with image of rider on a horse). Finally, it sets forth responsibilities for educating law enforcement and driving schools to the expanded guidelines relating to equestrian road safety and motorist responsibilities when encountering equestrians.

How SB25-149 Will Benefit Colorado's Equestrian Industry

The equestrian industry in Colorado is a significant part of the state's economy and culture. With tens of thousands of riders, trainers, breeders, and enthusiasts, this sector is an important contributor to the state's tourism, agriculture, and recreation industries. SB25-149 will:

- Boost equestrian participation by promoting safe and accessible equestrian events and trails.
- Create new opportunities for economic development in both urban and rural communities, as horse-related activities and businesses benefit from improved infrastructure.
- Strengthen the state's position as a top destination for equestrian events and activities, attracting visitors from across the country and beyond.

Community Response and Advocacy

Equestrians and community members have rallied behind SB25-149, sharing personal stories of accidents, difficulties finding suitable riding locations, and the general need for better support for the equestrian lifestyle. Through their advocacy, these individuals have shown how much this bill means to Colorado's equestrian community. Local equestrian organizations, riding clubs, and training facilities are voicing their support for the bill in increasing numbers, citing its

potential to improve the daily lives of riders and make equestrian sports safer and more accessible for future generations.

Conclusion

SB25-149 is a game-changer for Colorado's equestrian community. It's a direct result of the power of grassroots advocacy and shows that when equestrians come together, their voices can create meaningful change. With improved safety, infrastructure, and representation, Colorado will continue to be a leading state for equestrian sports and activities. The passing of SB25-149 would be a monumental step in ensuring that equestrians across the state have the resources and support they need to thrive.

As the bill moves through the legislative process, equestrians will continue to advocate for its passage, knowing that it represents not just a policy change, but a victory for the entire equestrian community.

For More Information and Links

<https://www.leg.colorado.gov/bills/sb25-149>

<https://communityequestrian.org/>