



PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

February 4, 2026

Mr. William Carstanjen
Chief Executive Officer
Churchill Downs, Inc.

Dear Bill,

Please see the attached complaint to the Louisiana Racing Commission regarding jockey Paco Lopez, now serving a six-month suspension at HISA regulated tracks for repeatedly raising his wrist above his helmet when striking horses, a clear violation of crop rules. Lopez is now racing in Louisiana at Churchill Downs, Inc.-[owned](#) Fair Grounds Race Course, and his behavior has not changed.

The whipping regulations in Louisiana, like the HISA rules, also prohibit use of the whip when the wrist is lifted above the helmet. As the complaint details, PETA has reviewed video replays of his races and documented that Lopez violated this regulation hundreds of times between October 2025 and the end of January 2026.

We urge CDI to take action to protect both the Thoroughbreds Lopez rides and the integrity of the Kentucky Derby.

Lopez has ridden in two Kentucky Derby qualifying races, the Gun Runner Stakes and Lecomte Stakes at Fair Grounds, aboard the Steve Asmussen-trained Chip Honcho. He violated the Louisiana wrist above the helmet whipping rule in both races, and in the Lecomte, he also violated the six-strike Louisiana limit by violently whipping Chip Honcho seven times.

It is already problematic that Kentucky Derby qualifying points can be earned at a non-HISA track—and one with different rules and poor enforcement. But there is no disparity in the whipping regulations. That Louisiana stewards and trainer Steve Asmussen are apparently complicit in flouting the regulations should compel CDI to take action. We urge you to ban Paco Lopez from Churchill Downs and to disqualify any Derby points his mounts have earned or will earn at Fair Grounds, including in the upcoming Risen Star Stakes and the Twinspires.com Louisiana Derby.

The Kentucky Derby is no place to reward jockeys who lack self-control and win by cheating.

[Washington](#)

1536 16th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202-483-PETA

[Los Angeles](#)

2624 W. Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90026
323-644-PETA

[Norfolk](#)

501 Front St.
Norfolk, VA 23510
757-622-PETA

Info@peta.org
PETA.org

[Entities](#)

- [PETA Asia](#)
- [PETA India](#)
- [PETA France](#)
- [PETA Australia](#)
- [PETA Germany](#)
- [PETA Switzerland](#)
- [PETA Netherlands](#)
- [PETA Foundation \(U.K.\)](#)

May I hear from you about this critical issue? Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kathy Guillermo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "K" and "G".

Kathy Guillermo
Senior Vice President