

February 4, 2026

Stephen Landry  
Executive Director  
Louisiana Racing Commission

Jason M. Boulet  
Senior Director of Racing  
Fair Grounds Race Course

PEOPLE FOR  
THE ETHICAL  
TREATMENT  
OF ANIMALS

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

Los Angeles  
2154 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

**Re: Repeated, Egregious Violations of Louisiana Whipping Rules by Jockey Paco Lopez**

Dear Messrs. Landry and Boulet:

This is to alert you that jockey Paco Lopez has been consistently violating Louisiana whipping rules—including in Kentucky Derby points qualifying races—since his relocation to Fair Grounds Race Course during his six-month suspension from racing in HISA jurisdictions due to similar violations. His signature whipping technique is to raise his wrist above his helmet to then deliver a violent strike with maximum force, in clear violation of Louisiana Rule §8902(F)(3), prohibiting jockeys in Thoroughbred races from using the crop “with the rider's wrist above helmet height.”

The following race screenshots show Lopez’s use of this illegal technique. He violates §8902(F)(3) with both his right hand and his left hand. All the exhibits can be found at this [Dropbox link](#).

Ex. 1: January 29, 2026, Fair Grounds, Race 2, riding Disco Ball:



- Entities:
- PETA Asia
  - PETA India
  - PETA France
  - PETA Australia
  - PETA Germany
  - PETA Switzerland
  - PETA Netherlands
  - PETA Foundation (U.K.)

Ex. 2: January 31, 2026, Fair Grounds, Race 1, riding Front Runnin:



Lopez uses this prohibited whipping method so often that one rarely even needs a program to identify him in the stretch run of a race.

The Louisiana rule is consistent with other states and in HISA jurisdictions, and the HISA rules use almost identical wording (“The crop cannot be used... If your wrist is raised above your helmet”), so Lopez should be aware of this crop use restriction. He has a long history of brazenly flaunting these rules, including in major stakes races, which led to his six-month suspension by HISA, and he continues to violate the whipping rules as they are defined in Louisiana.

For context, Exhibit 3 shows Lopez whipping Eclipse Award winner Book’em Danno in Saratoga’s \$500,000 Grade 1 Forego Stakes in 2025. This replay was used as an exhibit in Lopez’s latest HISA suspension.

Lopez continued to flagrantly disregard these whipping rules, even after HISA warned him multiple times that he was violating the terms of his reinstatement from a previous suspension. HISA CEO Lisa Lazarus said, when she announced the suspension, “Suspending Mr. Lopez for six months was not a decision taken lightly, but instead a last resort after numerous efforts to encourage him to be compliant with our rules failed.”

The screenshots we are providing of Lopez’s whipping technique are just a tiny fraction of Lopez’s violations in Louisiana. Please see the array of race replay screenshots in Exhibit 7. There are hundreds of other examples we’ve documented from race replays since Lopez relocated to Louisiana at the end of October 2025 through January 2026, as he uses this whipping technique in the stretch drive of virtually every race in which he is in contention.

Lopez routinely does this in tighter finishes, and he often inflicts these blows multiple times on the horse in a single race. Lopez even violated the whipping rules in both Kentucky Derby qualifying points races at Fair Grounds aboard Chip Honcho, first in the Gun Runner Stakes on December 20, 2025 (see Exhibit 4) and then again aboard Chip Honcho on January 17, 2026, in the Lecomte Stakes (see Exhibit 5).

In the stretch of the Lecomte Stakes, Lopez whipped Chip Honcho **seven times** using this violent overhead method with his wrist above the helmet. Not only was each one of these seven strikes an infraction, but this was also a violation of the 6-strike limit in Louisiana.

These violations also create an unfair advantage, which cheats other jockeys and connections out of valuable Kentucky Derby points and their rightful shares of prize money.

As he has not been fined or suspended for his actions during these Kentucky Derby qualifiers, Lopez must think he can ride in Louisiana with impunity. With enforcement lacking and no deterrents or penalties, this implicitly incentivizes the same conduct moving forward.

It's important to recognize that these aren't just "technical" or "administrative" rules violations. This prohibited whipping technique is also cruel and dangerous. His actions are designed to inflict as much force and pain on the horse as possible and create unnecessary safety risks for horses and jockeys. For example, there is one incident we would like to highlight that could have had dire consequences.

In the replay screenshots in Exhibit 6, you can see Lopez deliver a hard strike with his wrist above his helmet, causing the horse to veer to the rail, obstructing the horse on the inside, and almost causing a disastrous situation. Although Lopez was disqualified in this race for interference, he was not cited or penalized for the whipping violation.

This type of incident was not unexpected, as Lopez has a sordid reputation for reckless riding, even causing spills and injuries. And Lopez has at least 13 violations for excessive whip use; HISA has suspended him at least six times since 2019—including in 2024, when he cruelly struck a horse after a race, a full 20 seconds after crossing the finish line.

These highly visible, violent whip strikes by Lopez damage horse racing's fragile social license to operate. Both the reality and the optics of this are terrible for racing, given that public support for the sport is plummeting due to concerns about animal safety and welfare.

This lack of enforcement also appears to be a failure of oversight and warrants a full inquiry into why the rampant violations committed by Lopez in Louisiana have gone unchecked. In addition to investigating and taking appropriate disciplinary action against Lopez, we encourage the Louisiana Racing Commission and Fair Grounds to conduct a review of the job performance and competency of their stewards, to determine:

- Are the stewards fully aware of Louisiana's rules of racing?
- Why have the stewards not recognized these clear and obvious whipping infractions in the live races or replays?

- Are the stewards viewing all the replays and all angles to determine possible violations, or only examining a replay if triggered by a formal objection or inquiry?
- Are the stewards intentionally ignoring this rule, or are they reluctant to enforce or penalize?

It's baffling that the Louisiana stewards were not already on high alert to scrutinize Lopez's races for potential whipping violations, given his history and the fact that he only came to Louisiana to escape HISA jurisdictions during the six-month suspension for the same conduct. Was Lopez warned that Louisiana has the same whipping rules regarding "wrist above helmet" and that he would be under close observation?

We urge you to examine the mountains of evidence and to immediately and permanently revoke Paco Lopez's license to race in Louisiana. He certainly must be banned before the upcoming Risen Star and Louisiana Derby.

Please let us know if you need PETA's assistance in your investigation. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Kathy Guillermo  
Senior Vice President  
Equine Matters Department

cc: Bill Carstanjen, Churchill Downs Inc. [REDACTED])