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May 14, 2024

Elizabeth J. Kazinskas
 Council President
 Gardner City Council
 95 Pleasant St. Room 121
 Gardner, MA 01440

Dear Madam President,

I am writing to you today in support of the application submitted to the City Council by Bay State Racing, and to provide additional context around GAAMHA's interest in this matter.

As you are likely aware, Bay State Racing's proposal includes their intent to acquire the property owned by GAAMHA located at 827 Green St. This farm property is currently home to The Carl E. Dahl House at Evergreen Grove and R.O.O.T.S. at Evergreen Grove, both of which are programs operated by our agency. Both Dahl House and ROOTS represent incredibly unique and successful programs that are without peers in the world of substance use and mental health due to their innovative approach, and because they are both specifically designed to serve people with financial barriers to the quality of care that we offer. Since the day we opened in November of 2021, not one participant in our care has paid a single penny to take part. GAAMHA's ability to sustain this industry leading care relies heavily on fundraising through donations, grants, and a dedicated team of passionate individuals who are employed within these programs and throughout our agency. Over 50 rescued and endangered livestock animals also call our farm home, and the costs to feed and care for these amazing creatures continue to increase each year.

For the past three years I have been inspired by calls from around the country from clinical professionals looking at our work here in Gardner as a model they wish to replicate in their own regions. At this moment, providers in both Oregon and Ohio are planning to visit our farm in Gardner in 2024 to study and learn from our groundbreaking work. Evergreen Grove has been used as the site for clinical research projects for graduate students from Fitchburg State University and from the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. We've even played host to Jim Wahlberg and Wahl St. Productions who have captured interviews and footage of families impacted by substance use. Later this month, a team of academic professionals from the University of Denver, University of New Hampshire, Tufts Veterinary School, Green Chimneys School in NY, and The Land at Hillside Farms in PA will be visiting the farm to study our work. In August of this year, we expect to make global news in the equine world with the birth of two Newfoundland Ponies. This critically endangered breed typically only sees an average of 10 births each year worldwide, and our farm is home to the largest herd of Newfoundland Ponies in the United States. To have two births occur on one small farm is virtually unprecedented. As proud as we are of the accolades our work gets, and the attention it brings to the Greater Gardner Community, I am equally concerned as I look to the future.

The demand for our unique approach to care is overwhelming. Wait lists to enroll in our programs continue to expand beyond our grasp, and the prospect of being able to generate enough revenue to expand our facilities and programming is daunting.

GAAMHA is a 501(c)3 Non-Profit Charitable Organization
 We are proud to be W/NPO (Woman Non-Profit Organization) certified agency.

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This is where GAAMHA's goals of expansion and sustainability, and Bay State Racing's plan intersect. Bay State and GAAMHA have signed a Letter of Intent that would allow us to move our program just a short distance down Route 140 and build the facility of our dreams. The agreement includes not only the sale of our property to Bay State, but also a multi-million-dollar donation to our organization to facilitate the construction of a larger farm program. Our plan would be to expand the Carl E. Dahl House residential program from 16 to 24 beds and increase capacity by 50%. The new residence would also include a community meeting space where we could host training and other events to share our work with more members of the local community, and welcome visitors from all over to our great city. The ROOTS program, which currently operates out of a tiny modular trailer, would now be housed in a large and permanent facility that would create space to work with our animals in an indoor arena and remove our current barrier to serving more local youth. We currently perform all this work outside, which means for most of the year daylight and weather severely limit the hours available to host sessions with young people starving for a way to address mental health and substance use challenges in a setting that the genuinely enjoy and look forward to attending.

This letter is by no means a wholesale endorsement of horse racing, or the horse racing industry, which has had many challenges in its past. However, I can tell you that Bay State Racing has committed to adhering to the highest standards of animal ethics in their industry. Bay State has made this commitment not only verbally, but in writing as part of our agreement. GAAMHA's Board of Directors has met extensively with representatives from Bay State and insisted that this caveat be a part of our as part of our overarching agreement. To their credit, Bay State did not hesitate to make this commitment.

While Bay State's proposed operation would have obvious financial benefits to Gardner, so too would GAAMHA's expanded programming that would result. Over 50 clinical, support, and agricultural employees would come to Gardner each day to work, eat, and shop. Visitors from around Massachusetts and the entire country would get to enjoy all that Gardner has to offer when they travel to visit family in our programs or collaborate professionally with our teams.

Most importantly, this rare opportunity would increase the scope and quality of impact we have on the people we serve and help sustain our organization for decades to come. It is my sincere hope that you, and the entire City Council, will include these factors as you consider the proposal before you from Bay State Racing. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions or would like any additional information.

Sincerely,

Shawn P. Hayden, LADC-II
 President/CEO
shayden@gaamha.org

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