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## MEDIA RELEASE

DATE: May 27, 2022  
RE: Conviction of Jose Lopez-Villalba

**(Bel Air, Maryland)** – Albert J. Peisinger, Jr., State's Attorney for Harford County, has announced the conviction of Jose Lopez-Villalba, 42, for multiple counts of animal cruelty and possessing birds for cockfighting.

On May 10, 2021, Harford County Animal Control received a complaint about people engaging in cockfighting at 4366 Madonna Road in Street, Maryland. Upon arrival at that address, Officers inspected the 36-acre property and found approximately 100 chickens, most of which were roosters. Most of the roosters had been “dubbed,” which means their comb, wattles, and earlobes had been removed. This procedure is common with roosters involved in cockfighting because it prevents injury to these body parts while the roosters are fighting. Officers also found a fighting ring with a “sparring puppet” or fake stuffed rooster, which is used to train the roosters to fight each other.

Throughout the summer of 2021, Harford County Sheriff's Office investigators conducted surveillance of the property and made additional visits to check on the wellbeing of the birds. On June 3, they found one rooster with a lacerated wing and damaged plumage on his chest. These injuries are consistent with cockfighting. Investigators also found medical supplies that could be used to treat injured birds.

During the surveillance, Jose Luis Lopez-Villalba was identified as one person who likely owned the roosters and used them for fighting. Multiple videos posted by Jose Lopez-Villalba on social media were discovered that showed him carrying roosters into the pit and forcing them to fight. The location in the videos was identified as the same cockfighting pit that investigators previously observed.

On October 3, 2021, investigators obtained a search and seizure warrant for 4366 Madonna Road, assisted by veterinarians and other staff from the Humane Society. Investigators discovered 209 fowl on the property of which 135 were roosters. Many of the roosters had old injuries or scars that were consistent with cockfighting. Also found during the search were “keep cages” in a barn which are solitary confinement devices for roosters that are used to make them more aggressive before a fight. 55 of the roosters had been “dubbed” and accompanying veterinarians determined that 39 of the chickens were underweight. Mr. Lopez-Villalba was on the property near the cockfighting area when the search warrant was executed. He was interviewed and admitted to owning the sparring puppet and dubbing the roosters. He denied that the roosters were used for fighting, but he admitted having them “touch noses” and making them charge at each other.

On May 24, 2022, Jose Lopez-Villalba pled guilty to 20 counts of animal cruelty and 20 counts of possessing a bird for cockfighting. The Honorable Maurice Baldwin sentenced him to 6 years to be served in the Division of Corrections. Upon release, Mr. Lopez-Villalba will be subject to three years of supervised probation and an additional 114 years of incarceration should he be found in violation of that probation.

“Animal cruelty of any kind is disturbing and atrocious behavior, but forcing innocent animals to fight for sport is particularly cruel and heartless,” said Harford County State’s Attorney Albert J. Peisinger, Jr. “I am extremely proud of the work that my office and our partners in law enforcement and the Humane Society did to hold this man accountable for these heinous crimes. This sentence should serve as a warning that this type of reprehensible behavior will not be tolerated at any level in this County.”

Mr. Peisinger thanked Assistant State’s Attorney Cristin Treaster who prosecuted this matter and commended the Harford County Sheriff’s Office deputies and the Animal Control Unit personnel, the Department of Homeland Security as well as all of the volunteer veterinarians and staff from the Humane Society of the United States for their collective teamwork and dedication which resulted in the arrest and conviction of Jose Lopez-Villalba.