



OFFICIAL ILHA RULE BOOK



Effective January 2026

Overview

Introduction

The International Liberty Horse Association (ILHA) is the original and only recognized association for the Liberty discipline. The ILHA was founded to promote the Liberty discipline and celebrate Liberty training, horses, trainers, competitors and fans everywhere.

Mission and Purpose

The purpose of the International Liberty Horse Association is to:

- Unite all Liberty trainers, fans, enthusiasts, and horses
- Offer competitions for all levels and styles of Liberty
- Showcase the talents of Liberty competitors, trainers, and horses
- Develop and foster interest in the Liberty discipline
- Create and host shows and events for Liberty enthusiasts
- Protect the integrity of the Liberty discipline through responsible stewardship

Focus

The ILHA serves as the Official Governing Body of the Liberty Discipline and offers local, national, international, online, specialty and championship Liberty horse shows.

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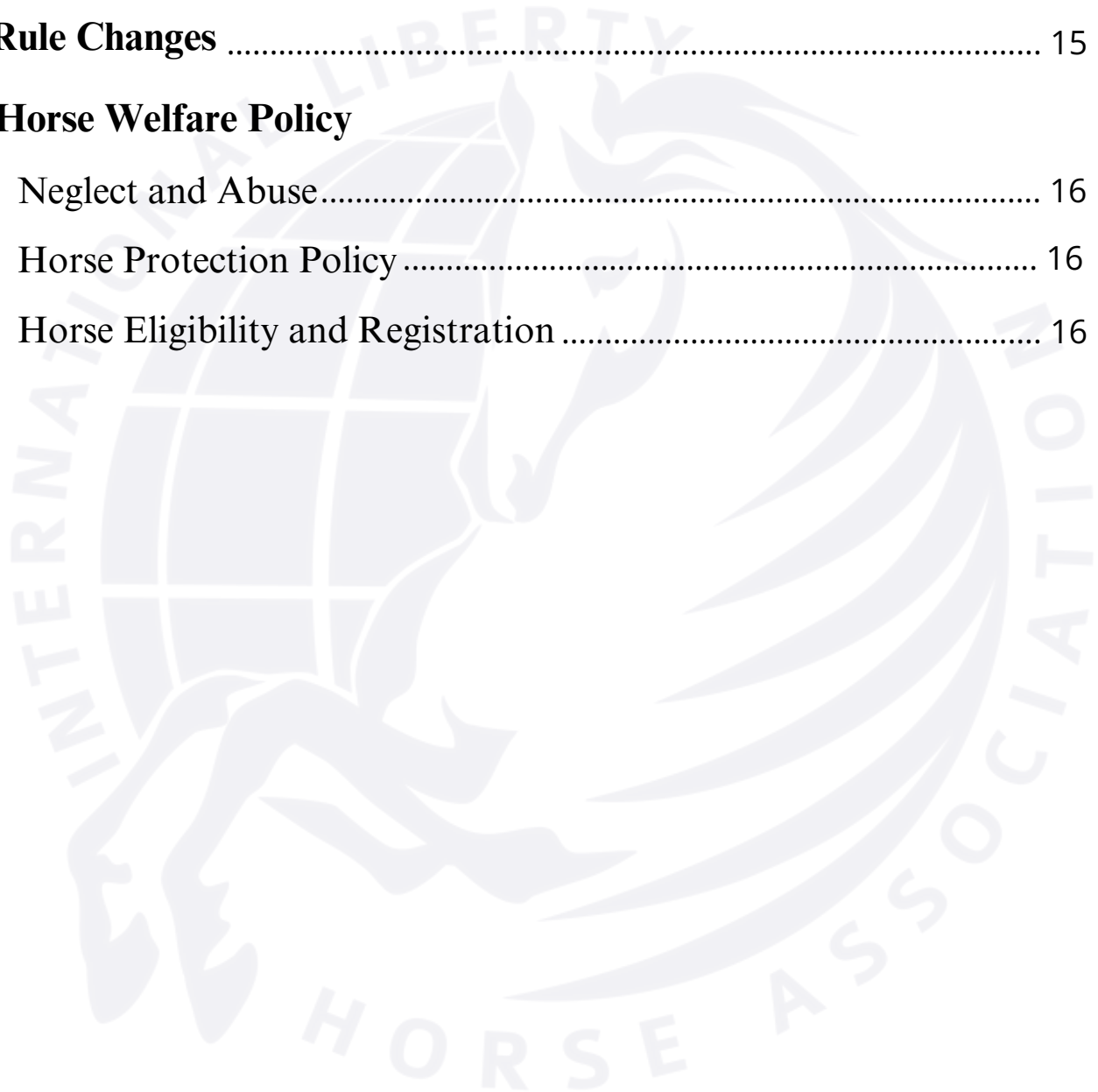
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Communciation

The ILHA is headquartered in Lexington, Kentucky and operates between 9AM - 5PM EST Monday through Friday

Contact us:



info@libertyhorseassociation.com

Visit us:



www.libertyhorseassociation.com

Facebook:



International Liberty Horse Association

Instagram:



[@libertyhorseassociation](https://www.instagram.com/libertyhorseassociation)

Podcast:



Life at Liberty Podcast

Official ILHA Competition Rules

Membership in the ILHA is a privilege not a right. Competing in ILHA shows is a benefit of the membership privilege.

MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT

- Code of Conduct:
 - By participating in the International Liberty Horse Association, members represent the ILHA and the event; therefore, the ILHA expects member/competitors and those associated with them (friends, family, coaches, students, etc.) to be good stewards of the community and to conduct themselves with the highest degree of horsemanship and sportsmanship before, during, and after the event.
 - Any violation of the ILHA Code of Conduct, will result in elimination of participation in competition up to or include revoking ILHA Membership.
- Inappropriate behavior, whether in person or online, may include, but is not limited to:
 - Possession, use, or distribution of any illegal drugs
 - Harassment, bullying, profanity, vulgar language, or gestures, or badmouthing (i.e., using words or actions that intimidates, threaten, demean, degrade, or persecute others), which includes public complaints about event policies, decisions, or protocols outside of the appropriate channels
 - Failure to follow rules
 - Abusing or neglecting a horse or unsafe horsemanship
 - Attempting to garner favoritism from judges or otherwise influence competition outcomes
 - Any verbal or physical act of discourtesy toward a judge, fellow competitor, event official, show staff, or anyone associated
 - Theft, vandalizing, or willfully damaging the property of others
 - Accusing other participants of any of the above in public setting is not appropriate. If a participant has concerns about another participant's behavior, that person should notify the ILHA staff via appropriate channels.

ATTIRE

- For all ILHA competitions, competitors are required to wear pants and a long-sleeve collared shirt of any style, fully tucked in. ILHA Freestyle classes are exempt from the attire requirements.
- Vests may be worn during competition as long as the collar and long sleeves are visible.
- Collared coats and/or jackets are allowed for Virtual shows only (not In-Person shows)
- Footwear can be any style but must be equine appropriate and safe (open-toed shoes are prohibited). Footwear during ILHA Freestyle classes must also be appropriate and safe.

- Back numbers must be worn and clearly visible throughout the entire pattern for all In-Person shows, failure to do so will result in an automatic “No Score”. Back numbers are not required during Freestyle performances.
- Violations of the ILHA attire rules will result in an automatic “No Score”.

HELMETS

- All competitors 18 and under must wear a properly fitted helmet that is securely fastened under the chin for any ridden work in any ILHA Class (including Freestyle classes).
- Failure to comply with the ILHA helmet rule will result in an automatic “No Score”.

TIME ALLOTTED

Pattern Time Allotment

- Unless otherwise stated, the maximum time allowed for any ILHA pattern during a competition is 4.5 minutes.

Show Manager & Time Allotment

- The Show Manager reserves the right to increase the time allotment for ILHA patterns performed in larger arenas. Competitors and judges must be notified of any changes in time allotted prior to the start of the show.

Pattern Time Start & Stop

- Timing for ILHA Patterns begins when the horse(s) and/or handler enters the arena (whichever comes first) and ends when both the horse(s) and handler have exited the arena.

Live Show Judging Time Allotment

- Unless otherwise stated, or unless there is a specific concern being discussed by the Judges, the maximum time allowed for ILHA Judges to judge a pattern in a Live Show is 2 minutes between competitors.

Virtual Freestyle Time Allotment

- Unless otherwise stated the maximum time allowed for any ILHA Virtual Freestyle is 5 minutes.

Live Freestyle Time Allotment

- In-Person (Live) Freestyle time constraints are set by the Show Manager.
- Timing for all In-Person (Live) Freestyle Classes starts when the first person, prop or horse enters the arena.
- Judging starts when the music starts or when both the competitor and the horse(s) are in the arena (whichever comes first).
- Judging ends when the competitor and horse(s) have exited the arena.
- Everything must be cleared from the arena by the end of the time limit to avoid a time penalty. The time penalty must be specified by the Show Manager prior to the show.
- Additional time allowances for extensive props, set-up and/or tear down may be made by the Show Manager but all additional time allowances must be done and the Judges notified prior to the start of the Freestyle Performance Class.

ARENA/SHOW PEN

Size

- ILHA Arena patterns for all ILHA Shows must take place in an area (arena, field, paddock or comparable space) that is a minimum 65 x 130 ft unless otherwise stated.
- All Training Level: Liberty and Training Level: At The Shoulder classes must take place in an area (round pen, paddock, small arena) that is a minimum 40ft in diameter. Shape does not matter – can be a round pen or square pen.

CONE SET-UP

General Cone Setup – All Classes (Except Freestyle, Obstacle, and Training Level Liberty)

- For all classes and patterns that require cones (except Freestyle, Obstacle, and Training Level Liberty), 4 cones must be set up in the arena/ round pen in the following positions:
 - Two cones must mark the center box of the arena/round pen/show area for judging.
 - Width: Place cones 9 feet apart, measured from the inside edge of one cone to the inside edge of the other.
 - Placement: Start at the center of the arena. Place one cone 4 feet 6 inches toward one end of the arena and one cone 4 feet 6 inches toward the opposite end of the arena, keeping both cones centered on the midline.
 - Two cones must mark the exact center line of the arena/round pen/show area
 - Two cones must mark the exact center line of the arena/round pen/show area and are to be placed approximately 10-15 feet from the perimeter on the inside of the arena/fence/panel/arena wall/etc. A video showing how to set up cones can be found on the ILHA website under the Competition Tab.
 - These help with orientation and serve as reference points for judges during the pattern.
- For these patterns, all 4 cones must be in position before the horse enters the arena. There is no penalty if cones are knocked over during the pattern.
- For virtual competitions, all 4 cones must be clearly visible at the beginning of the video.

Cone Setup - Training Level Liberty

- Training Level Liberty classes only require 2 cones for the pattern. These cones are placed up to 10 feet from the edge of a round or circular arena and placed directly across from each other.
 - Orientation
 - The cones are set in a straight line, splitting the arena into two halves horizontally from where the judges is sitting or the video being taken.
- No center-line cones are required for Training Level: Liberty patterns.
- Please refer to the official ILHA pattern diagram for exact cone placement.
- For virtual competitions, both cones must be clearly visible at the beginning of the video.

VIDEO POSITIONING (Virtual Shows)

- Videos must be filmed from the center of the arena, where the judge's seat would be (see ILHA website under the Competition Tab for reference diagram).

- All cones required for the pattern must be clearly visible at the beginning of the video.
- The video may zoom to follow the horse and competitor, but both must remain fully visible at all times.
- No editing, breaks, or cuts are allowed in the submitted video.
- Any violation of the ILHA video rules will result in an automatic “No Score.”

PATTERN JUDGING

Scoring

- All Pattern maneuvers are scored on a scale of 0 (did not complete maneuver) to 5 (completed maneuver perfectly) including half points.
- All Freestyle elements are scored on a scale of 0 – 10 including half points unless otherwise stated.
- Penalties include:
 - The horse going off pattern (does not adhere to the pattern as written). If the horse breaks pattern the maneuver that was not completed will receive a score of “0”. Scoring will resume with the next maneuver according to the pattern.
 - If a horse goes off pattern (does not adhere to the pattern as written) a second time the pattern will receive a “No Score” for not completing the pattern as written.
 - Any maneuvers added between the final maneuver of the pattern and exiting the arena will result in a “No Score”.

Incomplete/Skipped

- If maneuver is skipped/incomplete the maneuver that was not completed will receive a score of “0”. Scoring will resume with the next maneuver according to the pattern.
- If maneuver is skipped/incomplete for a second time the pattern will receive a “No Score”.

Refusal

- If a horse refuses a maneuver or obstacle:
 - The first refusal results in a 0 for that maneuver or obstacle.
 - The second refusal results in a 2-point penalty.
 - The third refusal results in a “No Score” for the pattern.

Disconnection

- Disconnection is defined as a horse(s) disconnecting with the competitor by physically leaving and/or ‘running off’. If the class or pattern involves more than one horses an occurrence will be defined as one or more horses disconnecting at the same time. For example: if a team of 3 horses all disconnect at the same time it will only be counted as one occurrence and judging will resume when all horses have reconnected and continue with the pattern.
 - The first occurrence will result in a score of ‘0’ for the maneuver during which they left and scoring will resume at the next maneuver after the horse and trainer reconnect and proceed with the pattern.
 - The second occurrence will result in an additional 5-point penalty.
 - The third occurrence will result in an “No Score” for the pattern.

- If a horse disconnects from the competitor by physically leaving during a Freestyle performance:
 - The first occurrence will result in a 2-point penalty.
 - The second occurrence will result in an additional 5-point penalty.
 - The third occurrence will result in a “No Score” for the performance.

UNPLANNED DISMOUNT

- Any unplanned dismount of the rider resulting from horse's movement (including but not limited to horse bucking, running off or not under rider's control) and/or rider's loss of balance will result in a “No Score” for the pattern. Unplanned Dismounts will be determined at the Judge's discretion.
- If there are two judges and at least one declares an “Unplanned Dismount” both judges must give a “No Score” for the pattern.
 - If there are three or more judges the majority must declare an “Unplanned Dismount” for there to be a “No Score”.
- If there are an even number of multiple judges at least two judges must declare an “Unplanned Dismount” for there to be a “No Score”.

LAMENESS

- If a horse is unsound/lame during an ILHA pattern or performance it will result in an automatic “No Score”.
- Soundness is determined at the sole discretion of the Judge(s).

EQUIPMENT

Allowed for all classes

- The following tools & equipment are permitted for use in all ILHA competitions:
 - Clickers are allowed in the competition arena and may be used at any time.
 - Liberty sticks, carrot sticks and whips (lunge, dressage, carriage, etc.) are permitted to direct and/or guide horse(s).
 - Halters, bridles, and/or bits are permitted if listed for specific classes.
 - Bell boots, polo wraps, leg wraps or any form of lower leg or hoof protection/support.
 - Saddles, bareback pads, surcingles and other equipment are permitted where listed by class.
 - Spurs are permitted for ridden classes unless otherwise stated.
 - Use any equipment not listed in the ILHA Rules is at the Judge's discretion. If a competitor has any questions, they must present them to judges or the show manager at least 24 hours before the show for approval or rule clarification.

Prohibited for all classes

- The following tools & equipment are not permitted for use during in any ILHA class:
 - Neck ropes with sharp edges, points or spikes of any kind
 - Neck ropes smaller than a 5/32 inch diameter

Prohibited for all classes with the exception of being used as costuming in Freestyle Classes

- The following tools & equipment are not permitted for use during in any ILHA class with the exception as being used as part of a costume during a Freestyle class:
 - Fly masks
 - Blankets
 - Tail wraps
 - Tail bags

Prohibited for specific classes

- The following tools & equipment are not permitted for use during Liberty or Minimal Movement Classes:
 - Halters or leads of any kind
 - Bridles, hackamores or neck ropes of any kind
 - Any type of equipment or restraint on the horse's body or torso
- The following tools and equipment are not permitted for use during Combined or Bareback & Bridleless Classes:
 - Halters or leads of any kind
 - Bridles or hackamores of any kind
 - Saddles of any kind ◦ Breast collar or stirrups of any kind
- The following tools and equipment are not permitted for use during Bridleless Classes:
 - Halters or leads of any kind
 - Bridles or hackamores of any kind
- Any violation of the ILHA Equipment Rules will result in a "No Score".
- The use of any piece of equipment will be governed by ILHA Judges, Stewards or officials of the event. Any tool or equipment may never to be used excessively, in an inhumane manner or in an abusive way. Violation of this will result in an automatic "No Score" for the pattern and a disqualification of the trainer from the remainder of the show.
- Any use of any equipment excessively, in an inhumane manner or in an abusive way at any ILHA event will result in the termination of the ILHA Membership of all individual(s) involved.
- Enforcement of the Equipment Rules are at the discretion of ILHA Officials.

TREATS/FOOD

- Administration of any treat or substance given orally either by hand, via a tool, or placed on equipment/props/ground during pattern or in the competition arena is prohibited.
- Violation of the ILHA Treats Rule will result in an automatic "No Score".

CALLERS

- Competitors have the option of having someone call out the pattern while they are performing at any ILHA show.
- Callers must be located outside of the arena or round pen where the pattern is taking place.
- Callers are only permitted to call the pattern as written.

- The use of callers will not be reflected in the scoring. ▪ Violations of the ILHA caller rules will result in an automatic “No Score”.
- Coaching the competitor in any way by the caller or anyone outside the arena is not allowed and will result in an automatic “No Score”.

FLAGGERS (Optional use of flaggers)

- Flaggers may be provided at any ILHA show at the Show Manger’s discretion.
- Flagger are only permitted for ILHA classes involving one or more horse at Liberty unless otherwise stated.
- If Flaggers are available, all competitors will have the option of using flaggers.
- Flaggers must remain outside of the arena (in a minimum of 2 corners or at each of the 4 corners of the arena) and are only permitted to flag within 10 feet of where they are positioned.
- Flaggers can only assist with a horse that has disconnected from the competitor.
- Flaggers can only assist if they are called on by the competitor either verbally or by signaling with a wave or nod or similar gesture.
- Flaggers can only flag from within 10 feet of their respective location in arena and must stop flagging when the horse reconnects with the competitor.
- Each time a handler calls for flaggers will be counted as a disconnect. If flaggers are called 3 times in a pattern it will automatically be scored as a “No Score”.
- If a Flagger accidentally enters the arena and assists a horse or mistakes a cue and enters the arena the competitor will have the option of starting the pattern over and can chose to do so immediately or be moved to the last competitor of the class. If the competitor chooses to redo their pattern only the new pattern will be judged and all scores in the existing pattern will be erased.
- Any violations of the Flaggers rules will be decided in favor of the competitor.

HORSES

- The same horse can be shown by up to but no more than 2 competitors in the same class.
- A competitor may show up to but no more than 2 different horses in the same class.

JUDGING

- If a Judge gives a ‘No Score’ they are required to enter the reason for the No-Score on the scorecard (can be written in the Comments section).
- Judges may elect to excuse a horse at any time at their discretion for reasons such as:
 - Unsoundness
 - Dangerous or out of control
 - Poor, unsafe, or abusive horsemanship
- A horse or competitor that is excused will receive an automatic ‘No Score’.
- Judges may elect to continue to score a pattern after a ‘No Score’ is given but are not required to do so.

- The Show Manager reserves the right to fine Judges for not judging according to ILHA Rules and/or the ILHA Judging Rubric. Fine amounts must be stated prior to hiring a Judge for a show.
- Attendance on Monthly Judging calls is not mandatory but will be recorded and shared with Show Managers upon request for selecting Judges for shows.

DIVISIONS

Division Criteria

- ILHA Division (Youth, Non-Pro, Pro & Senior) Criteria are clearly outlined on the ILHA Website. Competing in the wrong Division whether knowingly or unknowingly will result in automatic disqualification, forfeiting of awards and/or prizes and possible revoking of ILHA Membership.

PROTESTS

- To protect the integrity of the association and all events & competition, the ILHA reserves the right to correct the placings and awards if necessary.
- The decision of the ILHA is final and in its sole and absolute discretion.

Division Protest

- Division Protest – A protest can be made if there is reason to believe an ILHA Member has competed or shown in the wrong Division. Protests may remain anonymous to the member in question but the person bringing the protest must identify themselves and state the reason behind the protest to the ILHA staff. The burden of proof is on the person making the protest.

Scoring Protest

- Scoring Protest – A protest can be made if there is a discrepancy or error in the scores by contacting the Show Manager within 24 hours of when the scores are Live.
 - Process – The person placing the Scoring Protest must email the Show Manager and at least one ILHA full-time staff member within 24 hours of when the scores went Live outlining the discrepancy or error.
 - Response – The Show Manager must research the discrepancy and respond to both the notified staff member and person placing the protest within 48 hours of the result of their research and any adjustments that need to be made.
 - Result – The notified ILHA staff member will be responsible for making any changes or adjustments on the scoring platform and the Show Manager must contact any competitors affected by the discrepancy or error to notify them of any changes in scores or placings within 1 business day.

Judging Protest

- Judging Protest – A protest can be made on Judging for a class only if the following criteria are met:
 - The entire class was videoed by an official videographer hired by the Show Manager.

- The protest is made within 24 hours of scores going Live.
- There is reason to believe that the Judging did not follow or comply with one or more ILHA Rule or there is reason to believe that the Judging did not follow or comply with the ILHA Judging Rubric.
- Process
 - 1. The person placing the Judging Protest can choose to be anonymous to the Judges but must identify themselves and the reason for the protest to the Show Manager in writing via email within 24 hours of the scores going Live.
 - 2. The person placing the Judging Protest must pay the Protest fee of \$50 (unless otherwise stated) to the Show Manager upon filing the protest.
- Response
 - 3. The Show Manager must immediately contact the judge(s) to notify them that a protest has been made.
 - 4. The Judges and Show Manager have up to 48 hours to review the official video footage and make a ruling on the protest.
- Result
 - 5. The Show Manager must respond to the person filing the protest in writing via email with a ruling on the protest withing 24 hours of reviewing the footage and communicating with the judges.
 - 6. The Show Manager must notify an ILHA full-time staff member with any changes that need to be made to the show and notify any competitors affected by the protest and/or resulting modifications.

MEDIA

- ILHA Members agree to allow the ILHA to reprint, share, and otherwise promote blogs, images and video of their horses as well as use images of them and their horse taken at ILHA Shows and Events for promotional purposes.

COMMUNICATION

- Private messages to ILHA staff, management, show management or judge's personal phone number or email is not an acceptable way to conduct business within the organization.
- The ILHA office can be contacted via personal ILHA affiliated email accounts or info@libertyhorseassociation.com. The ILHA is headquartered in Lexington, Kentucky and operates between 9AM – 5PM EST Monday – Friday. ILHA Show Manager's contact information is included on every show registration page. Please allow 2-3 business days for a response.

RULES CHANGES

- The ILHA may amend rules and policies at any time without notice.
- Amendments will be posted to the website and announced via email.

- Participants are responsible for reviewing the website for updates rules.
- Rulebooks cannot be drafted to account for every possible scenario. There may be circumstances that arise during the course of the competition year that require ILHA governing bodies to decide what they deem to be fair and in the best possible interest for all parties and horses. The ILHA may do this at any time without notice. Should such a scenario arise, ILHA leadership will make a good-faith effort to notify those impacted by such decisions.

HORSE WELFARE POLICY

Neglect and Abuse

- Abuse and neglect of horse is a violation of ILHA policy.
- Alleged instances of horse abuse or neglect prior to, during or after any ILHA event may be grounds for disqualification. Practices considered to be abuse or neglect include but are not limited to inflicting physical harm, willful overworking, misuse of training equipment, or with holding grain or water as means of behavior modification.
- During competition, ILHA staff and/or Show Managers have the right to order veterinary evaluation of any horse who appears to be impaired or in physical discomfort for distress.

Horse Protection Policy

- When a competitor enters a horse, he or she agrees to take responsibility for the horse's well-being.

Horse Eligibility and Registration

- The ILHA does not impose an age range on horse eligibility or restrictions on discipline based on age. Owners/handlers are responsible for making level selections that they believe are suitable for their horse's age, condition, and training progress and objectives. Age is not a factor considered in judging.