

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF ALABAMA
NORTHERN DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)
)
 v.)
)
 WILLIAM COLON EASTERLING)

CR. NO. 2:21-cr-455-MHT-SMD

PLEA AGREEMENT

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. Attorneys

Defense Attorney: ChaLea Tisdale

United States Department of Justice Attorneys: Leigh P. Rendé, Gary N. Donner, and
Jonathan Ross

B. Counts and Statutes Charged

Count 1: 18 U.S.C. § 371 - Conspiracy to commit acts in violation of the Animal Welfare Act's animal fighting venture prohibition (7 U.S.C. § 2156) and the prohibition against operating an illegal gambling business (18 U.S.C. § 1955).

Count 2: 7 U.S.C. § 2156(a)(1) and 18 U.S.C. §§ 49(a) and 2 – Sponsoring or exhibiting an animal in an animal fighting venture on or about May 26, 2019.

Count 3: 7 U.S.C. § 2156(a)(1) and 18 U.S.C. §§ 49(a) and 2 – Sponsoring or exhibiting an animal in an animal fighting venture on or about January 23, 2021.

Count 4: 7 U.S.C. § 2156(a)(1) and 18 U.S.C. §§ 49(a) and 2 – Sponsoring or exhibiting an animal in an animal fighting venture on or about February 20, 2021.

Count 22: 18 U.S.C. § 1955(a) and 18 U.S.C. § 2 – Unlawful operation of an illegal gambling business beginning at a time unknown, but no later than January 23, 2021, and continuing through on or about June 11, 2021.

C. Counts Pleading Pursuant to Plea Agreement

Count 1: 18 U.S.C. § 371

Count 3: 7 U.S.C. § 2156(a)(1) and 18 U.S.C. §§ 49(a) and 2 – sponsoring or exhibiting an animal in an animal fighting venture on or about January 23, 2021.

D. Statutory Penalties

Count 1: 18 U.S.C. § 371

A term of imprisonment of not more than five years; a fine of not more than \$250,000, twice the gross loss to victim or twice gross gain to the defendant, whichever is greatest; or both the fine and imprisonment; a term of supervised release of not more than one year; an assessment fee of \$100; and an order of restitution.

Count 3: 7 U.S.C. § 2156(a)(1) and 18 U.S.C. §§ 49(a) and 2

A term of imprisonment of not more than five years; a fine of not more than \$250,000, twice the gross loss to victim or twice gross gain to the defendant, whichever is greatest; or both the fine and imprisonment; a term of supervised release of not more than one year; an assessment fee of \$100; and an order of restitution.

E. Elements of the Offenses

Count 1: 18 U.S.C. § 371

First: two or more persons in some way agreed to try to accomplish a shared and unlawful plan;

Second: the Defendant knew the unlawful purpose of the plan and willfully joined in it;

Third: during the conspiracy, one of the conspirators knowingly engaged in at least one overt act as described in the indictment; and

Fourth: the overt act was committed at or about the time alleged and with the purpose of carrying out or accomplishing some object of the conspiracy.

Count 3: 7 U.S.C. § 2156(a)(1)

First: The defendant knowingly sponsored or exhibited an animal;

Second: in an event in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce,

- Third: that involved a fight conducted or to be conducted,
Fourth: between at least two animals, and
Fifth: it was for the purpose of sport, wagering, or entertainment.

II. INTRODUCTION

Leigh P. Rendé, Gary N. Donner, and Jonathan Ross, attorneys for the United States, and ChaLea Tisdale, attorney for the defendant, William Colon Easterling, pursuant to Rule 11(c)(1)(A) of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, with the authorization of the defendant, submit this plea agreement. The terms are as follows.

III. THE GOVERNMENT'S PROVISIONS

1. Pursuant to Rule 11(c)(1)(A), the government agrees that it will, at the sentencing hearing, move to dismiss Counts 2, 4, and 22 as they pertain to this defendant. The government further agrees that it will not bring any additional charges against the defendant for the conduct described in the Indictment.

2. Because defendant has previously surrendered all of the chickens in his flock to the government, the government will not pursue the forfeiture allegation related to these birds. The government further agrees that it will not pursue forfeiture in this matter of the following real property: (1) defendant's residential property, located at 4295 County Road 528 in Verbena, Alabama, and identified by Chilton County Tax Assessor parcel ID number 42101020000014.001, and (2) the land on which the cockfighting arena and related structures are located in Verbena, Alabama, at or around GPS coordinates 32.748825, -86.433538 and identified by Chilton County Tax Assessor parcel ID numbers 142101020000005.000 ("Parcel 5"), 142101020000006.000 ("Parcel 6"), 142101020000006.001 ("Parcel 6.001"), and 142101020000007.000 ("Parcel 7").

3. The government reserves the right to argue for or against the application of any specific offense characteristic or Chapter 3 adjustment. Additionally, the government reserves the right to provide information to the United States Probation Office (Probation) regarding the defendant's criminal history. This agreement does not obligate the government to make any recommendation regarding the defendant's criminal history score or resulting criminal history category.

4. It is the government's position that the following sentencing factors of the U.S.S.G. will be consulted and taken into account by the Court for sentencing purposes pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3553, as construed in *United States v. Booker*, 543 U.S. 220 (2005):

- a. Base offense – Count One and Count Three relate to illegal conduct involving animal fighting and gambling and so the applicable guideline section is U.S.S.G. § 2E3.1, which calls for a base offense level of 16.
- b. Adjustments –
 - i. An upward adjustment of 4 levels is warranted pursuant to U.S.S.G § 3B1.1, as the defendant was an organizer or leader of criminal activity that involved five or more participants or was otherwise extensive.
 - ii. An upward adjustment is warranted pursuant to U.S.S.G. § 2E3.1 Application Note 2 because the offense “involved animal fighting on an exceptional scale (such as an offense involving an unusually large number of animals).”

5. The government acknowledges that the defendant assisted authorities in the investigation and prosecution of the defendant's own misconduct by timely notifying the

government of the defendant's intention to enter a guilty plea, thereby permitting the government to avoid preparing for trial and allowing the government and the Court to allocate resources efficiently.

6. Provided the defendant otherwise qualifies, and that the defendant does not, before the date of the sentencing hearing, either personally or through the actions of the defense attorney on behalf of the defendant, take any action inconsistent with the acceptance of responsibility, the government will move at or before the sentencing hearing for a further reduction of one level. See U.S.S.G. § 3E1.1(b). Determination of whether the defendant met the defendant's obligations to qualify for a reduction pursuant to § 3E1.1(b) is at the sole discretion of the government. Further, the government reserves the right to oppose the defendant's receiving a two-level reduction pursuant to § 3E1.1(a) should the government receive information indicating that, between the date of the plea hearing and the date of the sentencing hearing, the defendant, either personally or through the actions of the defense attorney on behalf of the defendant, has acted inconsistently with the acceptance of responsibility.

7. Except as set forth in this paragraph, the parties have no agreement regarding the calculation of the defendant's advisory Guidelines range. Pursuant to Rule 11(c)(1)(B), the government agrees to recommend a sentence at the low end (between bottom and middle) of the applicable advisory Guidelines range.

IV. THE DEFENDANT'S PROVISIONS

A. Plea and Sentencing

8. The defendant agrees to plead guilty to Count 1 and Count 3 and to make factual admissions of guilt in open court. The defendant further agrees to waive any right the defendant may have to subsequently withdraw the guilty plea pursuant to Rule 11(d). The defendant also promises to refrain from taking any action inconsistent with the defendant's acceptance of responsibility for the offense to which the defendant is pleading guilty.

9. The defendant understands that the parties have no agreement (except as set forth in this paragraph and in paragraph 7) regarding the calculation of the defendant's advisory Guidelines range, but that the government has agreed to recommend a sentence at the lower end of the applicable advisory Guidelines range.

10. The defendant understands that the defendant will be allowed to withdraw the guilty plea in the event that the Court does not accept any or all of the provisions set forth pursuant to Rule 11(c)(1)(A).

11. The defendant understands that the defendant will not be allowed to withdraw the guilty plea in the event that the Court does not accept any or all of the provisions set forth pursuant to Rule 11(c)(1)(B).

12. The defendant agrees not to commit any other federal, state, or local offense while awaiting sentencing, regardless of whether that offense is charged or chargeable. The defendant agrees to provide truthful information to Probation and to the Court in all presentence and sentencing proceedings.

13. The defendant expressly reserves the right to request a sentence that is below the bottom end of the applicable advisory Guidelines range.

B. Additional Requirements

14. The defendant agrees to forfeit \$57,090.00, seized from his residence as proceeds from the gambling operation related to the animal fighting venture. To the extent the defendant is able to demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the government, that any, but not more than \$30,000.00 was from a legal and legitimate source, the government will agree to return that amount to the defendant.

15. The defendant agrees to dismantle all components of the cockfighting and illegal gambling business operation that took place at and around the large barn located off of Country Road 528 in Verbena, Alabama, at or around GPS coordinates 32.748825, -86.433538. This includes, but is not limited to, the removal and disposal of:

- a. the barn structure;
- b. the cockfighting arena inside the barn, including stadium seating, public announcement system, cockfighting pits/rings and their barriers;
- c. the office overlooking the cockfighting arena inside the barn;
- d. the kitchen equipment in the barn where food was prepared and sold at cockfighting events;
- e. cockhouses inside of the barn;
- f. cockhouses outside of the barn;
- g. cockfighting merchandise inside and outside of the barn; and
- h. the merchandise shed outside of the barn.

Defendant agrees to complete the dismantling of all components of the cockfighting and illegal gambling business operation within 90 days of entering his guilty plea.

16. The defendant agrees not to own or possess any chickens for the duration of his sentence.

17. The defendant agrees after the 90 days referenced in paragraph 15 have elapsed to allow U.S. Department of Agriculture agents onto his property to inspect whether all of the components of the cockfighting and illegal gambling business operation have been dismantled.

C. Fines and Restitution

18. The defendant agrees to pay all fines and restitution imposed by the Court to the Clerk of the Court. The defendant acknowledges that the full fine and restitution amounts shall be considered due and payable immediately. If the defendant cannot pay the full amount immediately and is placed in custody or under the supervision of Probation at any time, the defendant agrees that the United States Bureau of Prisons and Probation will have the authority to establish payment schedules to ensure payment of the fine and restitution. The defendant further agrees to cooperate fully in efforts to collect any financial obligation imposed by the Court by set-off from federal payments, execution on non-exempt property, and any other means the government deems appropriate. The defendant also agrees that the defendant may be contacted by government officials regarding the collection of any financial obligation imposed by the Court without notifying the defendant's attorney and outside the presence of the defendant's attorney.

19. To facilitate the collection of financial obligations imposed in this case, the defendant agrees to disclose fully all assets in which the defendant has any interest or over which

the defendant exercises control, directly or indirectly, including those held by a spouse, nominee, or third party. Further, the defendant will, if requested by the government, promptly submit a completed financial statement to the Office of the United States Attorney for the Middle District of Alabama in a form the government provides and as the government directs. The defendant promises that such financial statement and disclosures will be complete, accurate, and truthful. The defendant expressly authorizes the government to obtain a report on the defendant's credit in order to evaluate the defendant's ability to satisfy any financial obligation imposed by the Court.

20. The defendant certifies that the defendant has made no transfer of assets in contemplation of this prosecution for the purpose of evading or defeating financial obligations that are created by this agreement or that may be imposed upon the defendant by the Court. In addition, the defendant promises that the defendant will make no such transfers in the future.

21. The defendant agrees to pay the \$100 assessment fee per count on the date of sentencing.

D. Freedom of Information Act Waiver

22. The defendant agrees to waive and hereby waives all rights, whether asserted directly or by a representative, to request or receive from any department or agency of the United States any records pertaining to the investigation or prosecution of this case, including, but not limited to, any records that may be sought under the Freedom of Information Act, see 5 U.S.C. § 552, or the Privacy Act of 1974, see 5 U.S.C. § 552a.

V. FACTUAL BASIS

23. The defendant admits the allegations charged in the Indictment and understands that the nature of the charges to which the plea is offered involves proof as to Counts One and Three. Specifically, the defendant admits the following to be true and correct:

- a. The defendant conspired with other people to violate the Animal Welfare Act's animal fighting venture prohibition, Title 7, United States Code, Section 2156, and to operate an illegal gambling business in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1955.
- b. Defendant owns a large barn and several nearby outbuildings located off of Country Road 528 in Verbena, Alabama, at or around GPS coordinates 32.748825, -86.433538 ("the Barn").
- c. The inside of the Barn consists of an arena with stadium-style seating for approximately 150 people which faces several cockfighting pits. Inside the Barn, there is also an office, a large kitchen, and several cockhouses. Outside of the Barn, there are several additional cockhouses, a merchandise shed, and a large parking area.
- d. Defendant and at least one other individual maintained the Barn and erected the surrounding cockhouses.
- e. From at least January 2018 through June 11, 2021, defendant and at least one other individual planned and promoted illegal cockfighting derbies at the Barn. These derbies involved a series of cockfights in which at least two or more

roosters fought each other, each with a sharp blade attached to its leg. Defendant knew these cockfights were illegal.

- f. From at least January 2018 through June 11, 2021, defendant promoted illegal cockfighting derbies at the Barn through telephone calls and text messages with other coconspirators.
- g. From at least January 2018 through June 11, 2021, defendant made arrangements with other coconspirators to help run various illegal cockfighting derbies at the Barn.
- h. From at least January 2018 through June 11, 2021, defendant along with his coconspirators maintained and promoted the rental of cockhouses in and around the Barn for use during cockfighting events. Defendant received rental fees for the cockhouses from people who paid for space in the cockhouses to board their fighting birds at cockfighting events.
- i. From at least January 2018 through June 11, 2021, defendant's coconspirators fought birds from defendant's flock at cockfighting derbies at the Barn, with defendant's knowledge.
- j. From at least January 2018 through June 11, 2021, many people drove to cockfighting derbies at the Barn, paid a gate fee to park near the Barn, and brought chickens which they fought at the Barn. To fight birds at the derbies, derby participants paid an entry fee at the Barn office. Defendant received a portion of the gate fees and entry fees that were collected during the cockfighting derbies at the Barn.

- k. Side-betting among derby attendees occurred during the cockfights at the Barn.
These bets involved staking something of value, such as currency, on the outcome of the various cockfights at the Barn. Defendant did not receive a portion of those side bets.
- l. On January 23, 2021, defendant hosted and aided and abetted in the hosting of a cockfighting derby at the Barn with more than 100 people in attendance.
Eventgoers paid a gate fee of \$30 per vehicle to enter the property. To fight birds at the derby, derby participants paid an entry fee at the Barn office. The entry fee that day was \$500 per entry (5 roosters per entry) with an additional \$100 betting option. There were approximately 39 entries that day.
- m. During the cockfighting derby on January 23, 2021, defendant used his mobile phone to provide a derby attendee, who was an undercover agent, with an image of the cockfighting schedule for the Barn. The schedule in the image listed 19 derbies from November of 2020 through August of 2021. Defendant asked the undercover agent not to give the derby schedule to everyone he sees.
- n. During the cockfighting derby on January 23, 2021, knives and other cockfighting paraphernalia were sold at a merchandise stand.
- o. On February 20, 2021, defendant hosted and aided and abetted in the hosting of a cockfighting derby at the Barn with more than 100 people in attendance.
Eventgoers paid a gate fee of \$30 per vehicle to enter the property that day. To fight birds at the derby, derby participants paid an entry fee at the Barn office. The entry fee that day was \$3,000 per entry (7 roosters per entry) with an

additional \$300 betting option. Several derby participants paid entry fees that day.

24. The United States shall be prepared to and will proffer those facts which the defendant may not have sufficient knowledge to admit. Specifically, the government will inform the Court that, if this case were to go to trial, the government would be able to prove that the animal fighting event that took place on January 23, 2021, at the Barn affected interstate or foreign commerce.

VI. THE DEFENDANT'S WAIVER OF APPEAL AND COLLATERAL ATTACK

25. Understanding that 18 U.S.C. § 3742 provides for appeal by a defendant of the sentence under certain circumstances, the defendant expressly waives any and all rights conferred by 18 U.S.C. § 3742 to appeal the conviction or sentence. The defendant further expressly waives the right to attack the conviction or sentence in any post-conviction proceeding, including proceedings pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2255. Exempt from this waiver is the right to appeal or collaterally attack the conviction or sentence on the grounds of ineffective assistance of counsel or prosecutorial misconduct.

26. In return for the above waiver by the defendant, the government does not waive its right to appeal any matter related to this case, as set forth at 18 U.S.C. § 3742(b). However, if the government decides to exercise its right to appeal, the defendant is released from the appeal waiver and may pursue any appeal pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3742(a).

VII. BREACH OF THE PLEA AGREEMENT

27. The parties agree that the issue of whether either party has breached this agreement at any time is one that will be resolved by the Court by a preponderance of the

evidence, except as set forth in Paragraph 29. The parties agree that, should either party obtain information causing the party to develop a good faith belief that the other party has breached this agreement, then the party will promptly file a written motion—or make an oral motion if doing so would be more expedient—asking that the Court declare the other party to be in breach of the plea agreement.

28. The parties agree that a breach of the plea agreement by the defendant would include, but not be limited to: (1) failing to fulfill each of the defendant's obligations under this plea agreement; (2) committing new criminal conduct; or (3) seeking to withdraw the guilty plea or otherwise engaging in conduct inconsistent with an acceptance of responsibility. Should the Court find the defendant to have breached this agreement: (1) the government will be free from its obligations under this agreement; (2) the defendant will not be permitted to withdraw the guilty plea; (3) the defendant's obligations and waivers under this agreement will remain in full force and effect; (4) the defendant will be subject to prosecution for other crimes; and (5) the government will be free to use against the defendant, directly and indirectly, in any criminal or civil proceeding, all statements by the defendant and any information or materials provided by the defendant, including statements made during the plea hearing and all statements made by the defendant pursuant to proffer letters.

29. The parties agree that, in the event that the defendant breaches this agreement by committing new criminal conduct, the government will be required to only establish probable cause to believe that the defendant committed a new criminal offense for the Court to find the defendant in breach of the plea agreement.

30. The parties agree that, should the Court find the government in breach of this plea agreement, the defendant may cancel this agreement and thus be released from the appellate and collateral attack waivers. The parties further agree that a breach of the plea agreement by the government will not automatically entitle the defendant to withdraw the guilty plea and, if the defendant should seek to withdraw the guilty plea on the basis of such a breach, then the defendant will be required to file a motion pursuant to Rule 11(d), which the government could oppose.

VIII. THE DEFENDANT'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

31. The defendant acknowledges that the Court is neither a party to nor bound by this agreement. The defendant understands and acknowledges that, although the parties are permitted to make recommendations and present arguments to the Court, the Court will determine the advisory Guidelines range and the sentence. The defendant acknowledges that the defendant and the defendant's attorney have discussed the advisory Guidelines and the statutory sentencing factors set forth at 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a) and the defendant understands how those provisions may apply in this case. The defendant further understands that the defendant will have no right to withdraw a guilty plea on the basis that the Court calculates an advisory Guidelines range that differs from the range projected by the defense attorney or the government.

32. The defendant acknowledges that the defendant authorized and consented to the negotiations between the government and the attorney for the defendant that led to this agreement.

33. The defendant understands that: (1) in pleading guilty, the defendant may be required to make statements under oath; and (2) the government has a right to use against the defendant, in a prosecution for perjury or for making a false statement, any statement that the defendant makes. However, as the defendant understands, the government may not use as evidence against the defendant in any future proceeding involving the charges alleged in the Indictment or related offenses, the defendant's guilty plea if the Court permits the defendant to withdraw that guilty plea.

34. The defendant understands that if the defendant pleads guilty pursuant to this agreement and the Court accepts that guilty plea, the defendant will waive certain rights, namely: (1) the right to plead not guilty or to persist in a plea of not guilty; (2) the right to a jury trial; (3) the right to be represented by counsel—and if necessary to have the Court appoint counsel—at trial and at every other stage of the proceeding; and (4) the right at trial to confront and cross-examine adverse witnesses, to be protected from compelled self-incrimination, to testify and present evidence, and to compel the attendance of witnesses.

35. The defendant understands: (1) the nature of each charge to which the defendant is pleading guilty; (2) the maximum and minimum possible penalties associated with each charge to which the defendant is pleading guilty, including imprisonment, fine, and a term of supervised release; (3) any applicable mandatory minimum penalty associated with a charge to which the defendant is pleading guilty; (4) any applicable forfeiture provision applicable to a charge to which the defendant is pleading guilty; (5) the Court's authority to order restitution; and (6) the Court's obligation to impose a special assessment.

36. The defendant confirms that the entirety of any agreement between the defendant and the government is set forth in this agreement and any addendum to this agreement and that the government has not made any promises to the defendant other than those contained in this agreement and any addendum to this agreement. This agreement consists of 18 pages and 41 paragraphs and an addendum.

37. The defendant confirms that counsel has competently and effectively represented the defendant throughout the proceedings leading to the entry of a guilty plea. The defendant is satisfied with such representation.

38. The defendant acknowledges that the defendant enters this plea agreement and pleads guilty freely and voluntarily. That is, the defendant acts without being influenced by any threats, force, intimidation, or coercion of any kind.

39. The defendant understands that this agreement binds only the Office of the United States Attorney for the Middle District of Alabama and the Environment and Natural Resources Division, and that the agreement does not bind any other component of the United States Department of Justice, nor does it bind any state or local prosecuting authority.

IX. THE ATTORNEYS' ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

40. The attorneys for the government and for the defendant acknowledge that this plea agreement, including the Addendum, contains the entirety of any agreement between the parties and that the parties reached this plea agreement in accordance with the procedure set forth at Rule 11.

41. The attorney for the defendant confirms that the attorney for the defendant advised the defendant of: (1) the nature of the charges to which the defendant is pleading guilty;

(2) the penalties associated with those charges; (3) the rights that the defendant is waiving by pleading guilty; and (4) the possibility that statements made by the defendant under oath during a plea hearing may be used against the defendant in a subsequent prosecution for perjury or for making a false statement.

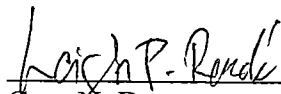
This 5 day of August 2022.

Respectfully submitted,

SANDRA J. STEWART
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

TODD KIM
ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL
ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES DIV.

Date: 8/5/22



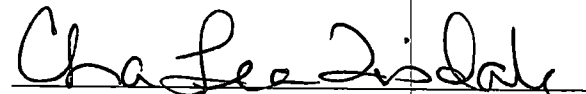
Gary N. Donner
Leigh P. Rendé
Jonathan Ross
Attorneys for the United States

Date: 8/5/22



William Colon Easterling
Defendant

Date: 8/5/22



ChaLea Tisdale
Attorney for the Defendant