

STATEMENT OF MUHAMMAD ALI
BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOREIGN COMMERCE
AND TOURISM
[Oversight Hearing on Professional Boxing]

May 22, 2002

Mr. Ali is appearing with his wife, Lonnie Ali, and his attorney, Ronald DiNicola:

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee for the invitation to be here this afternoon.

The Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act represents an important first step in the effort to improve professional boxing and, in particular, to protect the rights of professional boxers. I commend Senator McCain and this Committee for this historic measure and their continued efforts to enhance the image of professional boxing in America.

In preparation for my appearance here today, I asked my representatives to make contact with the athletic commissions in California, Nevada and elsewhere, and to speak with some of my friends in the boxing industry. My statement here today is based on the results of their findings and my own experience and observations.

The Act represents a long overdue effort to improve boxer safety, reduce conflicts of interests, discourage coercive contracts and create a uniform set of standards and procedures. There is, however, still much room for improvement.

Too many young fighters without representation are still signing agreements that are unfair and lacking in adequate safeguards. Although the Act affords a private civil remedy, many boxers lack the resources and sophistication to understand or take advantage of these procedures. Promotional agreements remain largely unregulated, uniformity of standards has not been attained and some commissions refuse to assume jurisdiction over violations of the Act.

As such, I make the following recommendations:

First, the Association of Boxing Commissioners should extend the use of uniform standards for bout and management agreements to promotional agreements, and Congress should insist on the use of these forms nationwide.

Second, uniform standards applicable to licensing in general, and medical requirements in particular, are needed to eliminate fraud, inefficiency and confusion in a sport where most fighters can expect to fight in multiple states and jurisdictions in any given year. Subsidies may be necessary to insure that fighters who fight at the "club level" have access to affordable medical screening.

Third, uniformity in scoring, combined with a national rating system in order to "judge the judges," should be considered as a means of reducing controversial and questionable decisions.

Fourth, federal legislation should mandate compliance with these uniform standards, provide for impartial binding arbitration in a forum convenient to the boxer, and, at a minimum, expressly authorize commissions to assume concurrent jurisdiction to address violations of federal law.

Fifth, the time has come for the creation of a national oversight body. This is necessary to assure compliance with the spirit and letter of the Act and other legislation designed to improve the sport and protect its participants. Federally mandated supervision is the only way to enhance the integrity of the sport and restore public confidence.

In conclusion, those of us who love boxing believe that it can and should be saved. The power to save it rests with you, Mr. Chairman, and with your esteemed colleagues. Boxing gave me a place and a purpose in the world. It gave me fame and fortune, and provided me a livelihood to support my family. Beyond that, it gave me relationships and memories that I will cherish all the days of my life.

Boxing gives to young men (and women) a chance to dream big and reach for the stars, or as Robert Lipsyte wrote many years ago, "to climb as high as your heart and legs can carry you." All boxing asks of its participants is hard work, determination courage and discipline. Those are great values for our time – indeed, for any time. It is left to us to preserve a sport that allows those values to shine brightly

Thank you.