

INCIDENT REPORT/STATEMENT

Date: 19 April 2025

Location: 1833 Chestnut Grove Rd. Winchester, VA 22603

Estimated time of incident(s): 1530-1630

Witness: Christie A. Ansley Richards (VCA member 2nd season)

Dear [VCA Board / Leadership Team and IBRA Board / Leadership Team],

Background

On April 19th 2025, I arrived at Maple Hill arena with my 15-year-old daughter, Emily Richards, and her 15-year-old friend, Savanna Lusk, who was under my care that day. Emily and Savanna were participating in the VCA sanctioned goat tying scheduled to take place from 12:00-14:00 and the VCA/IBRA sanctioned Barrel Racing and Pole Bending events following. They each rode our mare, Twilight, for goat tying swapping off between runs.

During her second run, Emily lost her balance during dismount and fell forward and suffered minor scrapes and bruises. However, she quickly got up and completed this run and the following without further incident. Savanna completed all three of her goat tying runs without incident. I have video recordings of all 6 goat tying runs.

Afterward, Savanna and Emily went to the announcer's booth to sign up for the Barrel Racing and the Pole Bending, rolling their Open times to Youth, and Emily entered a separate Youth run on Twilight. I signed their event forms as the Parent/Guardian and they paid their entry fees. The girls then went back to the trailer located at the top of the hill to tack up their horses.

I had not even taken a photo of the posted draw. I asked Brandi Nicholson, who was seated next to where I was standing if she would text me the photo of the Draw, which she did through Facebook Messenger. Savanna was scheduled at #10 and Emily was #13 in 'Open' (see attached photo).

Incident Overview

As the Peewee event concluded, the Open Class began. Savanna was sitting on her horse next to Emily on her horse. I was giving both girls a pre-run pep talk when Alison DeHaven abruptly shouted from the announcer's booth "Savanna! "Get in here now." Her tone and urgency were jarring. I looked into the announcement booth to see Alison DeHaven looking intensely at Savanna. Savanna, confused, pointed to her chest in a gesture to confirm if she was being addressed. She quickly dismounted and handed her reins to Emily and ran towards the booth. As her guardian, I followed directly behind her.

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I thought 'perhaps there was a clerical error or issue with her entry or something even more serious, given the tone Alison had used when shouting for her. I had to pause at the alley way before crossing for a Emma Rollison and her horse Neveah to enter the arena (see video). Upon entering the office, Alison DeHaven immediately began accosting Savanna, accusing her of sending a photo to her mother referencing payout. There were at least 2 other parties present (I believe Anna Helms and another party I did not register) and engaged in the overtly hostile verbal exchange directed at Savanna. Alison shouted to the effect of 'if you or your mother have a problem with my show, you need to come to me directly' and 'You had no business discussing it elsewhere.' Savanna, clearly confused and upset, stated that she didn't know what was going on and repeated several times that she did not even have a phone and stated that she didn't know what this was about. She excused herself from the confrontation, visibly shaken. I instructed her to "Go get on your horse, I'll be right over."

I then asked, "what is going on?" Alison stated that "Savanna had sent a photo." I stated that "She (Savanna) doesn't have a phone and could not have." Alison then aggressively leaned forward in her chair and pointed her finger shifting the accusation to me and shouted "Well, then it was YOU!" She insisted "There are only two people in this arena who would have sent a picture, and it must have been you then." At this point I was very taken aback but remained calm and attempted to deescalate the situation. I stated I had no knowledge of any photo nor document and that I had no idea what she was referencing. Alison again insisted that "I had just sent a picture of her payout to Jennifer" and that it was "the contractor's discretion to charge what they wanted and distribute funds how they wanted." I told her again I did not send a text to anyone nor any photos. I was still incredibly confused. The 'Open' had just begun with no payouts defined yet, and I was not aware of the peewee payout being posted. I again restated that I was not even aware of what she was referring to nor was I following any of what she was accusing me of. She then stated that Jennifer had already received several warnings from the association and was about to be kicked out of the Association. I again stated I did not send any text message and was not following any of this.

At no point did Alison provide clarity or evidence about what had been sent, nor why the confrontation warranted such an aggressive tone--especially toward a minor, right before her run.

Emotional Impact

After returning to the girls, I found Savanna crying and on a call with her mom on her smartwatch. Savanna stated "I don't know what just happened. I don't know why she was shouting at me. I am only 15 and I can't even take a picture without a phone." Jennifer asked to speak with me, she asked if she needed to head to Maple Hill (a 3-hour journey) or if we needed to leave, I said I would not be leaving Savanna unattended and would not let anything happen to her. Jennifer stated she was going to be contacting the board immediately and would call me back.

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This very public reprimand, misdirected and based on unverified assumptions, was not only inappropriate, but deeply upsetting for Savanna. She was left crying and emotionally rattled minutes before her competition.

I turned to Savanna and I said, "I don't know what this madness is about, but this is your drag, and you are about to run, and you just have to pretend all that didn't happen right now." Savanna said, "No one is allowed to shout at me like that aside from my mom." I told her she was absolutely correct that what happened was entirely inappropriate. I told her, "I don't know if what just happened was deliberate, in an attempt to rattle you right before your run but you cannot let it!" I then said "take a deep breath...then another" I assured her we would get to the bottom of this but not right now and to put it as far out of her mind as she could. Savanna's run took place at 1542 and was recorded by me and timestamped. After Savanna ran, I told Emily to start warming up her horse and for Savanna to cool her boy down.

The timing of the confrontation—right before her run—was, in my opinion, extremely damaging, calculated and intentional. I did my best to help refocus her, despite knowing how rattled both girls were.

As both girls moved out of earshot, I turned to Brandi Nicholson who was sitting right next to me (but is very good friends with Alison and had been at her house the day before) and I quietly stated, "I don't know what in the hell just happened, but Alison just tore into both me and Savanna." I said, "it was completely uncalled for." Brandi then stated "Well, Alison told me that Jennifer was kicked out of Highschool Rodeo and has a real problem with every person on the VCA board." Brandi stated, "Jennifer is the common denominator in all this."

While I stood at the fence, Alison approached me, loudly repeating her accusations about Jennifer with spectators and competitors all around. Alison was referencing Jennifer's alleged removal from High School Rodeo and accused Jennifer of "doing this all the time" 'Blowing up people's phones during shows that she isn't even attending and changing or correcting points that did not need to be corrected' and so forth, and that Alison was 'tired of it!'. Emily, already anxious from the earlier confrontation, witnessed this second outburst moments before her run. I instructed Emily to not worry and to continue warming up, she was visibly distressed. Emily ran at 15:47 (timestamped).

As soon as she completed her run, she came out of the arena, jumped off her horse, loosened his cinch, and we walked up towards the trailer. Our friend Brittany Bishop was standing at the top of the hill with her husband and Savanna. Brittany came down and we spoke briefly about Emily's run and then Brittany gave some pointers to Emily for her next youth run. We then walked up towards the trailers, and I quietly said to Brittany out of earshot of the girls or anyone that "There was a crazy incident right before both girls ran." She nodded her head, widened her eyes and said

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“Oh.” I said I have to go call Jennifer and Brittany said she was just leaving; she had stayed to watch Emily’s run. We said goodbye and agreed to possibly meet at the Henry Arena the next weekend for an IBRA/NBHA show.

Following the brief exchange with Brittany Bishop, I met Savanna further up the hill she was about 10 yards away and was speaking to Sherry Miller and her mother on her smartwatch. I briefly described to Ms. Miller what I had just witnessed and experienced. We then ended the call. I told the girls we needed to get back down for youth and for pole bending shortly.

Savanna was clearly still extremely upset, and she stated, “I am so pissed off right now” (she did not shout this and it happened at the top of the hill by the trailers) I said, “I know, we adults are supposed to be good at emotional regulation but that had failed by one party today, but we can’t let that impact how we react.” I again told Savanna that “you can’t get sucked into the narrative that someone else is trying to write or the picture someone else is trying to paint” I said “We are going to go down there and we are not going to say a word regarding what had happened, we are going to pretend that none of this happened, we are going to run our events, look after our horses, collect any winnings, and then we will leave.”

I instructed the girls that if they see anyone giving them a look or anything to simply give a smile in return.” I jokingly said, ‘If someone approaches you, if I am not there, inform them that you must have your ‘Commanding Officer’ present before any discussion can take place.” Both girls laughed and displayed their smiles for me, and we proceeded down the hill to the arena for my daughter to run her mare in youth and the girls to prepare for pole bending.

Once down at the fence, I realized I did not have the youth draw and reluctantly went over to the announcement booth to get a picture of the draw as I approached the window (below was the posted draw) I heard someone making hushing sounds and whispering “She is right out there, shhhh.” I took the picture of the draw and immediately went back over to the girls. I did not say anything. Emily ran the youth barrels.

This entire incident was emotionally destabilizing for two minor participants. It was compounded by additional whispers overheard at the announcer booth and then, as described further on, additional curt behavior by Alison DeHaven toward my daughter during her attempt to resolve a draw issue for Pole Bending. Even as an adult with experience navigating high-pressure environments, I found the hostility and dismissiveness we encountered to be profoundly disappointing.

During the Open Pole Bending they announced the final rider “Kara Barb”, Emily’s name was not called, and I told her to dismount and run up and simply let them know “that you are paid and should be on the Open Pole Bending Draw.” Emily came back expressing that she had gone to the window and had stated that she should be in the draw and didn’t hear her name to which she said

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Alison DeHaven curtly stated that she would have to ask someone else that she couldn't help her, Allyson Reid then told her she could run after the last rider.

Emily came back and said, "I guess I am in trouble too now." I said just shake it off, we have done nothing wrong, mount up and try to have a nice calm run. Her horse who had run the poles beautifully the night before hit just about every pole. I know all the horses were reacting and feeling the stress that we were all trying very hard to suppress. Both girls, understandably, performed below their usual standard.

It was clear by this point that both girls felt singled out, confused, and discouraged—emotions no youth participant should experience at an event meant to foster growth and development. I cannot overstate how critical it is that adults in leadership positions model respectful, inclusive, and emotional intelligent behavior.

Final Moments and Reflection

I remained with the girls until they completed all their events. We collected winnings, loaded the horses, and departed for the three-hour journey home. What should have been a day of excitement and camaraderie instead turned hostile, stressful, and demoralizing for two young competitors.

The public confrontation directed at Savanna and me was a violation of the duty of care this organization owes to its youth participants. Even if there were concerns about prior communications or a parent's behavior, none of those issues should have been directed at or taken out on a 15-year-old competitor minutes before her run.

My Background

I was active duty Army and am now a Senior Strategic Advisor for the Department of Defense (DoD), I have extensive experience in leadership, youth development, and mentorship. I have developed and run multiple DoD internship programs for emerging young leaders. I not only played Rugby and Volleyball at the professional level advancing to the US National team and the Army and Joint Forces Team, being fortunate to be mentored by the absolute best, but I then became certified and worked with USA Rugby as a Youth Developer and Youth Coordinator helping develop players and teams in California and across the US. I ran barrels in Texas throughout high school and into my career in the US Army, so understand the competitive environment but also had amazing mentors and role models within. Many of my friends advanced to the Pro-circuit. My core belief is in raising up the next generation by modeling discipline, inclusivity, and integrity.

My experience has taught me how quickly confidence and trust can be eroded when authority figures mis-use their platform or create toxic environments.

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Closing

As adults involved in youth development—particularly those in leadership roles with this organization—we have a solemn duty to set an example. It is imperative that board members and association leaders strive to uphold a respectful, and positive environment for *all* competitors, regardless of personal dynamics or history with other adults.

I share this account not to escalate division, but to advocate for a more supportive and safe environment for all participants. I remain available and open to discussing this further and will provide supporting documentation if requested.

2024 was our first season with VCA and second season barrel racing. At the beginning of the 2024 season my daughter had undergone a heart procedure and this sport and organization was a light in her recovery. For nearly the entire season we ran exclusively at MH/RB. At the end of the season when there seemed to be a discrepancy in the points we began running at other shows to try to recover some of the points. We traveled down to CM&M where we first met Jennifer and Savanna Lusk. They were very kind, helpful and welcoming. They invited us to come to Western Riders next show, which we did. We have participated at only a handful of shows with them. I was not privy to any of the accusations and allegations made against them. My experience to date with the Lusks has always been very positive and they have always been very friendly and helpful and from my perspective they exemplify what this organization is about. The events I witnessed on the 19th of April at Maple Hill were totally unacceptable.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Christie A. Ansley Richards

Senior Strategic Advisor, Department of Defense

Former U.S. Army Officer | Certified Youth Sports Coach

On an aside note:

Within this organization, there are very apparent and established cliques—groups that members either belong to, or do not. While this dynamic can naturally occur in any competitive environment, I feel it's especially important for **board members** to actively avoid engaging in behaviors or activities that may unintentionally exclude others.

From the perspective of an engaged observer, it is unfortunately quite clear that at MH and RB there are children being favored and exuberantly cheered on by those in the announcer's booth including both members of the board, and there are children who are not. Board members have a responsibility to set the tone and culture for the organization, and that includes ensuring that everyone, but especially every child feels equally valued and encouraged. It's demoralizing and

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antithetical to the core mission of both Virginia Cowboy Association and the International Barrel Racing Association and simply that of youth in sports—to build character, confidence, and community.

I do hope that we can remind all VCA representatives that young and impressionable minds are watching and learning. That there is no place for this type of behavior and it will not be tolerated.

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2:44 PM 04/19/25

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Producer: 2162 Maple Hill Arena, Show Date: 04/19/25

Contact: Alison DeHaven

Location: Maple Hill Arena, Winchester, VA

Announcer List: Open 4D

* = Rider is on multiple horses

1. Erica Lillie/TT Redneck Ransom	Time =
2. Emma Rollison/Neveah	Time =
3. McKenna Hoffman/Willow	Time =
4. Allyson Reid/Pecan	Time =
5. Brittany Bishop/Ooooh La La	Time =
6. Lauren Campbell/Aries	Time =
7. Lisa Garcia/Dallas	Time =
8. Kimberly Belford/Likely A Heat Wave (Moose)	Time =
9. Alison DeHaven/Kissed By Faith (Jitterbug)	Time =
10. Savanna Lusk/Mac Daddy Disco	Time =
11. Emmah Duvall/Tim	Time =
12. Alison DeHaven/MH Expensive Corona (Corona)	Time =
13. Emily Richards/Twisted Dry	Time =
14. Kara Barb/Honey	Time =
15. AnnaJane Cribbs/R Drifting Docs Cash (Junior)	Time =
16. Justin Campbell/Goose	Time =
17. Natalie Ash/Sadie	Time =
18. Allyson Reid/Dun Been Encountered (Dun)	Time =
19. Ella Reid/Cattarina	Time =
20. Emma Rollison/Smart Lil' Catori	Time =
21. Kimberly Belford/MH Jess So Expensive (Pistachio)	Time =
22. Alison DeHaven/Dolly Love (Athena)	Time =
23. Terri Westfall/VooDoo	Time =
24. Natalie Ash/Jolene	Time =
25. Ella Reid/Autumn Blues	Time =
26. Emma Rollison/Heavenly Sweet Mirage (Sedona)	Time =
27. Anna Helms/Smart Goal	Time =
28. Alison DeHaven/PB Chisum Fritz	Time =