

Gardiner: First bill to pass will be injury reporting for greyhound tracks



Senate President Andy Gardiner said Wednesday he will revive the bill to require the greyhound racing industry to report animal injuries and have the measure sent to the House during the first week of the 2015 session.

“It’ll be named after Mrs. Gaetz,” he said, referring to Vicky Gaetz, the wife of former Senate President Don Gaetz who is an animal lover and worked to help persuade lawmakers to pass the bill last

year.

The bill died in the final week of the 2014 legislative session after it became entangled in pari-mutuel industry politics.

Unlike other states, Florida’s greyhound industry does not have to report when dogs are injured as a result of racing or training. The bill, SB 2, was filed Tuesday by Sen. Eleanor Sobel, D-Hollywood. It imposes fines on track veterinarians who fail to report race-related injuries and follows a similar bill passed in 2013 that requires tracks to report greyhound deaths. In the first 9 months of 2013, [74 greyhound deaths were reported](#) – more than one every three days.

“I sort of think the bill, whether it was timing or anything else, should have been resolved last year,” said Gardiner, R-Orlando, speaking to reporters in his Tallahassee office. The measure got caught in a late-session fight after the House and Senate abandoned attempts to update the state’s gambling laws. The Senate had pushed a plan to end the requirement that dog tracks race greyhounds in order to keep their gaming permits but it died amid fierce opposition from the powerful greyhound track owners.

There is no indication what the House will do with the bill once it is received but there is pressure on House Speaker Steve Crisafulli to attach to the injury reporting bill provisions that would allow greyhound tracks to phase out greyhound racing. Other proposals being discussed would allow counties – like Palm Beach and Lee – whose voters have approved slots machines at their racetracks, to be allowed to convert their greyhound tracks to slots casinos.

Florida has more greyhound racing than any other state, but is one of only two states that do not require injury reporting. The racing schedule is still tethered to a 1997 law that allowed track owners to operate poker rooms only if they operate 90 percent of the races they held back then and animal activists say it forces tracks to run more races than is healthy for dogs. The animal-rights industry has been working for years to get passage of the so-call “de-coupling” bill that would allow tracks to reduce their racing schedule and, ultimately, end dog racing.