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Animal abuse groups say greyhound protection bill gaining support

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Five years into their efforts to end greyhound racing in Florida — or at least protect the dogs from injuries and what they call inhumane care — animal rights activists say 2015 is the “seminal moment” in their campaign.

“Hopefully, this is the year,” said Kate MacFall, the Florida state director of the Humane Society of the U.S. “The support from the legislature is the most we’ve seen.”



Senate President Andy Gardiner, R-Orlando has said a greyhound protection bill filed in honor of the wife of former Senate President Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, will be the first bill to pass the Senate this year.

[The Humane Society](#), the [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals](#) and Grey2K have launched statewide campaign to pass legislation that would require the reporting of injuries to racing greyhounds. In addition, the groups want to decouple dog racing and other forms of gambling, which the groups believe are keeping dog racing alive.

As it stands now, certain forms of gambling are only allowed at facilities that offer live racing. Tracks keep greyhound racing – even though it often is not profitable – so they can provide more lucrative slots and poker.

By pushing the concept of [decoupling](#), the animal groups want to put dog racing in a position where the other types of gambling would no longer need it.

In advance of their lobbying efforts, Grey2K and ASPCA released an 80-page study last week that investigates greyhound racing, breeding and handling, along with economic analysis of greyhound racing in the seven states where greyhound racing is legal.

However, Florida is the focus of the report, [High Stakes, Greyhound Racing in the United States](#) with 12 of the remaining 21 tracks in nation. In 1931 Florida became the first state to legalize greyhound racing.

Carey Theil, executive director of Grey2K USA said some dog track owners are supporting decoupling efforts. However, the Palm Beach Kennel Club has not taken a position and has refused to do so until it gets permission to offer slots at its dog racing complex.

“It’s an irresponsible position that holds the greyhounds hostage,” Theil said of the club’s non-committal stand on decoupling. “Until they get slots, nobody gets anything.”

When offered an opportunity to comment on Thiel’s remarks and explain its position on decoupling, Palm Beach Kennel Club spokeswoman Sarah Mears responded via email.

“Palm Beach Kennel Club has been successful with its year-round racing dates and currently we have no intention of changing our racing schedule,” Mears wrote. As for whether the kennel club makes a profit on its dog racing, Mears wrote:

“PBKC is a positive contributor to the local economy, an industry leader, a viable entertainment option and a true community partner.”

Although several animal protection bills have been filed, including one aimed at racehorses, the campaign is supporting bills filed by Senator Eleanor Sobel, D-Hollywood, [SB 2](#), and [HB 129](#), filed by Rep. Jared Moskowitz, D-Coral Springs.

The bills would require greyhound track veterinarians to complete and sign a form under oath of all injuries to racing greyhounds that occur on the racetrack. Owners, kennel operators and trainers would be required to file reports of injuries that do not occur on the racetrack.

The report must contain details of where, when and how an injury occurred, weather and track conditions and the distance and post position. Reports must be filed within seven days of the injury and will be available to the public for seven years.

Since 2008, 11,722 greyhound injuries have been reported nationwide. However, those data do not contain Florida injuries because Florida currently does not require injury reporting.

The Palm Beach Kennel Club supports “reasonable measures that would require reporting of racing-related injuries,” and is committed to making “meaningful progress on this front,” Mears wrote.

“PBKC has made significant progress in attempting to reduce serious greyhound injuries at the track through various measures, including improvements to track surfaces, new safer lure technologies, safer fencing, widening of turns and other techniques,” Mears wrote. “Greyhound racing is proud of these advances, but we also recognize that further improvement is needed.”

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