

Grey2K USA activists protest greyhound racing, state laws outside Naples-Fort Myers Greyhound Track



About 20 activists protested Saturday afternoon for better treatment of racing dogs outside the Naples-Fort Myers Greyhound Track in Bonita Springs. (Ryan Mills/Staff)



About 20 activists protested Saturday afternoon for better treatment of racing dogs outside the Naples-Fort Myers Greyhound

By *Ryan Mills* of the *Naples Daily News*

Posted: **March 19, 2016**

Holding signs that read "Greyhounds are love" and "Greyhound racing kills," about 20 animal rights activists protested outside the Naples-Fort Myers Greyhound Track on Saturday afternoon to call for

Track in Bonita Springs.
(Ryan Mills/Staff)



About 20 activists protested Saturday afternoon for better treatment of racing dogs outside the Naples-Fort Myers Greyhound Track in Bonita Springs.
(Ryan Mills/Staff)

better treatment of racing dogs and ultimately an end to dog racing in Florida.

Chuck Danielian, 73, a local volunteer with the Greyhound advocacy organization Grey2K USA, said his group usually protests outside of the track three times per year. Saturday's protest, from 4 to 5 p.m., was the group's third of the current racing season, which kicked off Oct. 30 and runs through May.

The activists, who say dog racing is cruel and inhumane, are calling for a law that would allow Florida card rooms to operate without the requirement that they also offer greyhound racing. It's a proposal that has been bouncing around Tallahassee for years, but has never passed the Legislature.

"To us, it's just a common sense issue," Danielian said, as car horns honked in support of the protest.

Izzy Havenick, the vice president for government relations for the track's ownership group, said the owners, too, want to decouple racing from their card room. Greyhound racing at the Bonita track is a money-losing venture that can't go on much longer, he said. Instead, they are pushing to add slot machines to their wagering and poker game offerings.

The activists are protesting at the wrong place, Havenick said.

"We're both advocating for the same bill," he said. "They should be protesting in Tallahassee. They should be protesting outside legislators' offices. We're on the same side."

The decoupling legislation is opposed by anti-gambling activists, the theme park and "family friendly" tourism industries and the Seminole tribe, which runs casinos in Florida.

The protesters are also pushing for a law that would require track owners and kennels to report racing dog injuries to the state. Although an omnibus gambling bill died in the Legislature during the session that ended in early March, lawmakers included a requirement in the budget that the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation adopt rules to require injury reporting at the state's 12 dog tracks. Those rules are still to be negotiated.

Only six states in the U.S., including Florida, allow greyhound racing, according to Grey2K USA. Danielian said he doesn't believe decoupling greyhound racing from other gaming options would end racing in Florida right away. Instead, he suspects, it would be phased out over time.

"We're trying to be realistic about it," he said.