

Bill could end live greyhound racing

By Zac Anderson , Herald-Tribune / Monday, March 2, 2015

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TALLAHASSEE — The Sarasota Kennel Club and other greyhound racing tracks across Florida could end live racing and still maintain more lucrative forms of gambling under legislation filed Monday that also would allow two casinos in South Florida.

The 316-page bill contains a host of provisions — many long sought by gambling interests — that have failed to clear the Legislature in recent years.



Greyhound racing in Sarasota. (Herald-Tribune archive)

But sponsor Dana Young, R-Tampa, said this could be the year for legislation to advance because the state is renegotiating its deal with the Seminole Tribe of Florida for exclusive rights to most casino games.

Young is particularly passionate about allowing greyhound tracks to end live racing, describing the industry Monday as “a sport that is declining in popularity.”

“Its time has come,” Young said.

State records show the Sarasota Kennel Club took in \$5.3 million from wagering on live greyhound races at the track during the 2013-14 fiscal year and \$5.4 million from poker.

Tracks with slot machines take in substantially more revenue, and some are likely to end live greyhound racing altogether if allowed.

The House bill also requires reporting of greyhound injuries. A greyhound injury reporting bill is expected to pass the full Senate this week.

The most controversial aspect of Young’s legislation is a provision that would authorize two “destination resort” casinos in South Florida.

The casinos could only be sited in Miami-Dade or Broward counties, and each would be required to invest \$2 billion and make minimum payments of \$175 million per year to the state.

Young noted that the legislation “appears to be a significant net revenue increase” for the state but still described it as a gambling contraction because the total number of pari-mutuel permits would be reduced.

Some have speculated that the legislation may simply be an effort to put pressure on the Seminole Tribe to come up with larger annual payments to the state.

A summary released with Young’s bill notes that the Seminoles are paying \$255.6 million to the state in the current budget year.

The destination casinos would pay \$350 million and “unlike the Indian gaming facilities . . . will also pay state and local taxes for all operations of the resort.”

CORRECTION
A previous version of
this story had an
incorrect amount for
Sarasota Kennel
Club's 2014 revenues.
