

June 13, 2013

Oversight of dog racing should be transparent

The Daily Mail's Dave Boucher **reported June 5** that the state racing commission refused to provide details about three men disciplined for abuse or neglect of racing greyhounds.

In response, Executive Director Carey Thiel of the greyhound protection group GREY2K USA wrote that West Virginia's policy makes it an outlier among states that permit greyhound racing.

In Florida, the state with the most greyhound tracks, state reports of cruelty to the dogs result in full investigative reports that are available to the public.

In Texas, Iowa, Arizona and Arkansas, judges' rulings - issued at tracks - "include a narrative section with a detailed explanation of the incident."

Jon Amores, executive director of the West Virginia Racing Commission, initially declined to give details of the incidents that resulted in three people either losing their trainer's licenses or in suspensions.

Amores further said that judges panels at tracks aren't allowed to speak about such cases, and that the state does not retain supportive documents like witness statements.

To the commission's credit, **it has since provided the material** Boucher requested under the state's Freedom of Information Act. That's the right thing to do, and it should continue.

Thiel said GREY2K has sought and received 619 board of judges' rulings from West Virginia tracks since 2007. More than 98 percent contained few or no details about the incidents that led to the rulings.

As Thiel pointed out, failure to document the disposition of neglect or cruelty cases could hamper attempts at prosecution under the state's anti-cruelty law. It also prevents regulators in other states from getting information about people who seek greyhound trainer's licenses.

That shouldn't be.

The West Virginia Racing Commission should be a leader, not a reluctant follower, in oversight of how greyhounds are treated. If that takes legislative or policy changes, let's make it snappy.