



## Florida Lawmakers Address Expanded Gambling

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The Florida Senate Committee on Gaming took more testimony Feb. 4 in an effort to shape future policy on expanded gambling in the state.

According to the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation, the state has 16 Greyhound tracks, four Quarter Horse tracks, three Thoroughbred tracks, one Standardbred track, and seven jai-alai frontons. Twenty-five of those facilities have card rooms, and seven have slot machines.

There also are 11 unused pari-mutuel licenses, eight Indian casinos, bingo parlors, and unregulated casino "cruises to nowhere" and Internet gambling cafes. There has been a push, however, for privately owned, full-scale resort casinos in the state.

Much of the Feb. 4 testimony dealt with the pros and cons of expanded gambling, cannibalization of existing facilities, and using casino revenue to support racing.

Bill Lupfer, president of the Florida Attractions Associations, said the group is concerned about a gambling expansion. He said about 90 million people travel to Florida each year for various activities, but only a small percentage visit strictly for gambling.

Horse and dog racing have long been part of Florida tourism, though on-

track pari-mutuel handle has declined in recent decades.

Lupfer said other states have authorized casino gambling because they "lack the other things that Florida has (to attract visitors). When it comes to tourism, Florida is the envy of the world. The Florida brand is unique, and I fear decisions that could impact the family-friendly Florida brand."

Dr. Steve Fisch of United Horsemen of Florida offered statistics that show a Thoroughbred population of 201,000 and a Quarter Horse population of 93,800 in Florida. Fisch, an advocate for Quarter Horse racing, said the Florida horse industry generates about \$3 billion in goods and services and has an overall economic impact of \$5.1 billion.

The Quarter Horse breeding and racing industry has rebounded, he said, with the re-opening of Hialeah Park several years ago. Other operators have exploited a loophole in state law and offer pari-mutuel Quarter Horse barrel racing in an attempt to open card rooms and pursue slot machines.

The Florida Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association and Florida Quarter Horse Racing Association oppose such operations, calling them "phony horse events" that threaten the state's horse racing industry.

"It is imperative that the development of any long-term gaming policy by Florida's legislature take into account the annual economic impact of Florida's horse racing industry," Florida HBPA executive director Kent Stirling said. "Legitimate horse racing in Florida employs more than 104,000 people annually, and is responsible for our Ocala-based horse breeding industry annually ranking among the top three states in the nation.

"Let me be clear: Our hard-working horsemen will not allow the recent rash of phony horse-related events to enable a greedy few to squander our enormous job-creation engine for the people of Florida, or make a mockery of our state to the international horse racing community."

Officials with the Palm Beach Kennel Club Entertainment Center, which has a card room and received local but not state approval to add slots, said the facility pays \$5.3 million in state and local taxes per year, has a \$15.6 million payroll, and pays \$4.8 million a year in purses for Greyhounds.

Palm Beach is one of the healthier Greyhound tracks in the country; for fiscal year 2013-14 it plans to offer 468 performances amounting to about 7,000 live races.

Mat Forrest, a lobbyist for Palm Beach, said 12 local organizations have endorsed slots at the facility. He said area residents don't understand why

people can gamble in unregulated cafes and game rooms in Palm Beach County but the dog track can't have machines even though the public approved them in a referendum last year.

Carey Theil, executive director of GREY2K, a Greyhound welfare organization that opposes dog racing, told lawmakers wagering on live Greyhound racing has dropped more than 70% from 1990 to 2012, and taxes and fees on live racing have dropped almost 98% during that period. Theil said there are only 22 dog tracks in seven states, and that 10 states have banned Greyhound racing.

Theil offered "policy recommendations" that include "decoupling" of live racing from card rooms in Florida and mandatory injury reporting for the public. He said GREY2K has no position on expanded gambling in Florida but believes it shouldn't "resuscitate or prop up Greyhound racing in any way."

Theil dismissed the practice of using gaming revenue to supplement racing purses.

"I think the cannibalization has already largely occurred," Theil said. "The policy has failed everywhere it has been tried."