

Charleston Gazette-Mail

Daily Mail editorial: Past time to end greyhound racing subsidies

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In a state facing major revenue shortfalls and no quick turnaround in sight, what should leaders do?

Question all spending, for one. Every dollar.

Too many times state expenditures — like regulations — become habit just because it's easier to maintain them every year than questioning whether they are still useful. Now that the state is in budget crisis, every expenditure should be looked at again and again.

Perhaps no expenditure is more questionable than the state's \$21 million subsidy to greyhound racing.

A bill introduced in the state Senate, SB 641, is the latest effort to eliminate state subsidies for the long-struggling greyhound industry, the [Gazette-Mail's Phil Kabler](#) reported Thursday.

Last year, a study requested by the Legislature concluded that state subsidies for racing purses and breeders' funds account for 95 percent of industry revenues, as attendance and live wagering at the state's two greyhound tracks have dwindled over the years.

Unlike a bill proposed last year that would have given greyhound owners and breeders a three-year, \$36 million buyout, the new legislation simply moves the estimated \$21.2 million of state Lottery funds that would go to subsidize greyhound racing in the 2016-17 budget year to the state's general revenue fund.

The bill would also decouple the two greyhound racetrack casinos, removing a requirement that they conduct greyhound racing in order to keep their racetrack video lottery and casino table games licenses.

And it would eliminate \$10 million a year of matching funds the casinos can draw down to upgrade their gaming areas, also putting those funds into general revenue to help close budget shortfalls.

Decoupling greyhound racing from the casinos is an idea way past due. If the greyhound racing survives on its own, so be it. If it collapses without the subsidies, so be it as well. The state should not be in the business of long-term subsidies for businesses that can no longer stand on their own.

To be sure, the subsidies don't come from taxpayers, but gambling revenues. Greyhound racing is subsidized, under the force of state law, by the two casinos with greyhound race tracks — Wheeling Island and Mardi Gras in Cross Lanes, who must pay a certain percentage to the West Virginia Racing Commission, which in turn pays the Greyhound Breeding Development Fund.

Still, that money could be better used in the state's general revenue fund, helping to plug revenue gaps and make greyhound racing survive or succumb based on market demand.