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PASSED! Hamrick's Bill Stops Subsidy for Greyhound Racing & Adds \$14 Million to Road Fund

By Connect Clarksburg Staff | March 07, 2016

The House of Delegates today passed a bill to end millions of dollars in subsidies for the state's greyhound racing industry and instead direct those funds into the State Road Fund.

House Bill 4625 would divert the racetrack video lottery funds currently dedicated to the Greyhound Development Fund and greyhound racing purse funds to the road fund once the bill becomes effective. The bill passed on a 61-36 vote.

"With the poor condition of our state's roads, it's wrong that we continue to direct millions of dollars each year to prop up an industry that provides little additional return to the state's investment when those dollars could be better used to fix our roads," said House Speaker Tim Armstead, R-Kanawha, who was lead sponsor of the bill. "This bill sets the right priorities for the use of taxpayer dollars."

In fiscal year 2015, approximately \$16.2 million went to subsidize the greyhound racing industry. The legislation passed today is expected to generate about \$14 million for the road fund in the coming year.

"While this bill won't solve our road funding shortfall, it does provide a sorely needed boost to our State Road Fund," said Roads and Transportation Committee Chairman Marty Gearheart, R-Mercer, a co-sponsor of the bill. "This bill will fill more potholes, pave more roads and provide much needed support for the construction and maintenance activities of our Division of Highways."

Joining Armstead and Gearheart as sponsors of the bill were Delegates Kelli Sobonya (R-Cabell), Brian Kurcaba (R-Monongalia), Roger Hanshaw (R-Clay), John Overington (R-Berkeley), Danny Hamrick (R-Harrison), Kayla Kessinger (R-Fayette) and John Shott (R-Mercer).

"This legislation will add much needed funding to help our Department of Highways repair and maintain our roads. Diverting \$14 million from gambling subsidies to our road fund just makes good sense at a time when the state has a \$350 million budget deficit," Delegate Hamrick said.

"The top concern I consistently hear from my constituents is to do something to improve our roads - not our greyhound industry, but our roads," said Delegate Brian Kurcaba, R-Monongalia. "This bill will shift more money to the area our people want to see addressed most, and I believe it will be a far better use of our state's resources."

"While this bill does not end greyhound racing, it will redirect millions of dollars to our road fund for much-needed maintenance projects that for years went into the pockets of a handful of greyhound dog breeders," said Delegate Kelli Sobonya, R-Cabell. "In a two-year span, five individuals received nearly \$5 million. The majority of West Virginians prioritize roads instead of bolstering the pockets of breeders of dogs."

The bill now goes to the Senate for further consideration.



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