

# First victories in fight to help greyhounds | Opinion

By **Carey Theil**

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Greyhounds and supporters are in a race for freedom

SEPTEMBER 4, 2016, 2:02 PM

**S**ix years ago, the state legislature nearly adopted a landmark bill to help greyhounds, but the plan faltered just as it neared the finish line.

Under state law, gambling facilities must hold money-losing dog races in order to offer other forms of gambling. A bill to remove this dog racing mandate passed overwhelmingly in the House and Senate in 2011, but died on the last night of session after the two chambers failed to resolve minor differences. I was in the Capitol that night and worried that the defeat of this decoupling bill would cause continued suffering of greyhounds.

Sadly, my fear has become a reality as 336 young dogs have died at Florida tracks since the state began tracking such deaths in 2013.

Out of this early loss, however, emerged a diverse movement to help dogs. At the statewide level, strong conservative lawmakers joined with principled progressives in a call for change. In local communities, grassroots advocates began to mobilize. Meanwhile, editorial boards and humane organizations across Florida added their support. These greyhound champions rolled up their sleeves and went to work, and are now starting to win tangible victories.

In early August, the Seminole County Board of Commissioners approved an ordinance to require greyhound injury reporting at Sanford Orlando Kennel Club, ensure public disclosure on the fate of dogs that leave the track and eliminate a loophole that exempts greyhounds from county licensing and inspection laws. The commission voted to help dogs after volunteers successfully collected more than 14,000 signatures from local voters in support of the proposal.

Meanwhile, the Legislature recently passed a budget proposal by Sen. Tom Lee to require all greyhound injuries statewide be reported to the public. Regulators are now implementing this rule, while at the same time strengthening the enforcement of greyhound cruelty violations. Even the Florida Greyhound Association, a lobby group that represents greyhound breeders, has suggested token reforms. For over a decade, the association has fought every attempt to help greyhounds, so this flip-flop is welcome news.

There is still a lot of work to do. Every three days, a dog dies at a Florida track. Greyhounds endure lives of confinement; dogs are fed cheap "4-D" meat from downed animals to reduce costs; and female dogs are given anabolic steroids. In a desperate attempt to remain economically viable, the greyhound industry cuts corners, relying on standard practices that are cruel and inhumane.

In the coming years, we will fight to improve the lives of racing dogs, at both the state and local level. We will seek to prohibit the use of anabolic steroids and 4-D meat, restrict greyhound confinement, prohibit euthanasia except in rare cases, fund greyhound adoption through a percentage of betting taxes, increase funding for state regulation, improve track safety to reduce injuries and eliminate a state law that allows convicted felons to be responsible for the daily care of greyhounds.

Most importantly, we will continue to urge lawmakers to pass greyhound decoupling. It is wrong for the state to force private businesses to lose money on an activity they no longer want to participate in and which causes the suffering of thousands of dogs.

Earlier this year, Arizona became the 40th state to prohibit greyhound racing, leaving Florida as one of only a handful of states that still hosts dog tracks. I have no doubt the greyhounds will win this race for their freedom, but wonder how many more dogs will die along the way.

*Carey Theil is Executive Director, GREY2K USA, the largest greyhound protection organization in the United States.*