

# Charleston Gazette-Mail

## Bill Maloney: Time to end greyhound subsidies (Daily Mail)

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In the heat of my gubernatorial debate with acting Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin in 2011, I was asked specifically where we would cut the budget by moderator Hoppy Kercheval.

My response was to start with greyhound subsidies and go from there. Fast forward six years, and we now have a huge opportunity to finally do the right thing and put a civilized end to this horribly failed industry.

With the passage of [Senate Bill 437](#), West Virginia is faced with a simple choice. We can either continue to subsidize greyhound racing, a moribund industry that can no longer sustain itself, or we can use the same dollars to shore up our state budget.

As West Virginia's budget crisis grabs headlines and continues to permeate all discussion under the Capitol dome, SB 437 is a great step in ending a needless subsidy that places further strain on precious taxpayer dollars.

As an industry, greyhound racing is no longer viable. Gambling on dog racing has dropped precipitously over the past 25 years, and the activity is now illegal in 40 states. Due to this decline, we are now propping up greyhound racing with \$15 million in annual subsidies, funds that would otherwise be used for vital state services like higher education, health care and law enforcement.

To understand this issue, it's important to understand how the subsidy program was created. It was passed in 1994 as an attempt to revive dog racing.

By every metric it failed, and in the 20 years that followed, gambling on live greyhound racing declined by 71 percent.

Two other states, Iowa and Rhode Island, adopted similar subsidy schemes at the same time as West Virginia, and these programs also failed. Rhode Island passed greyhound decoupling in 2009 and Iowa followed suit in 2014. In fact, this greyhound subsidy program has failed in every state in which it was tried.

In defending their subsidies, greyhound breeders have been less than forthcoming about the facts. They have a right to state their case, but they should not be allowed to invent facts. Two years ago, the Legislature hired the independent research firm Spectrum Gaming to examine the greyhound subsidy issue, and their findings have guided our legislative work.

For example, the Spectrum study directly refuted the false jobs claims that have been circulated by dog race promoters.

Spectrum found that in reality, the greyhound industry employs about 600 people, most of them are part time, and these employees "could be retained by the tracks in new positions." Sometimes it seems like greyhound breeders will literally say anything to protect their free ride.

Spectrum also found that half the subsidies are being given to only 10 individuals, and roughly two-thirds of all subsidy dollars immediately leave West Virginia and are paid to greyhound breeders in other states.

At the Wheeling track, more subsidy dollars were being paid to Kansas residents than to West Virginia residents. The state is also on the verge of losing money on greyhound racing, because regulatory costs exceed revenues.

It is important to also note the humane concerns. According to Racing Commission records, more than 7,000 greyhound injuries have been reported at West Virginia dog tracks since 2008, including 2,678 dogs that suffered broken bones. During the same period, 376 greyhounds have died after suffering catastrophic injuries.

A recent survey by MBE found that 73 percent of West Virginians support ending the greyhound subsidy. It is time that West Virginians save the precious financial resources that are wasted on this unnecessary subsidy.

SB 437 does not end greyhound racing in West Virginia. Rather, it simply ends the state subsidy and allows casinos the flexibility to determine whether they want to continue without a state mandate. Quite simply, the market should and will decide.

Bill Maloney, a "recovered candidate for governor," is a founder of the West Virginia Center for a Brighter Future, as well as a founder, investor and member in other West Virginia-centered groups.