

Patrick nixes cut in state's tax on greyhound simulcast

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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, AUG. 21, 2014.....Arguing it would sap \$600,000 budgeted for the Gaming Commission, Gov. Deval Patrick sent back to the Legislature a bill that would lower the state's take on greyhound simulcast wagers.

“The bill does not provide any replacement for that lost revenue, and the FY15 General Appropriations Act anticipates that the full fees will continue to be paid,” Patrick wrote in a Wednesday letter to lawmakers. “Accordingly, the bill would leave the Racing Division nearly \$600,000 short of its operating budget this year, and would create an annually recurring shortfall of approximately the same amount.”

The Gaming Commission's Racing Division oversees live horse racing at Suffolk Downs and Plainridge Racecourse, and simulcast races that are available for wager at the two horse tracks as well Raynham Park, a former dog track.

The bill only applies to simulcast greyhound racing, and officials have said it would bring the state's share of the handle on greyhound simulcast down to the same level the state takes for simulcast horse racing.

Faced with smaller crowds of gamblers, the state's racing tracks have attempted to hitch themselves to the fledgling casino gaming industry.

Plainridge, located in Plainville, won the state's lone slots license and has reportedly begun construction on a new facility. Suffolk Downs, which straddles Revere and East Boston, is vying against Wynn Resorts for the Metro Boston resort casino license, and Raynham had been in the running for the slots license.

After voters abolished greyhound racing in Massachusetts in 2008, Raynham closed its track, while continuing to offer simulcast racing.

The bill (H 4365), originally filed by Rep. Shawn Dooley, would also reduce the number of live racing days Suffolk Downs and Plainridge would need to hold in order to keep running simulcast races. Patrick left that language intact while striking the provision that reduces the state's share of simulcast greyhound wagers.

Backers of the ballot initiative to eliminate greyhound racing have argued that passage of the referendum should have banned Bay State betting on out-of-state simulcast greyhound racing as well. They say simulcasting was reauthorized through the 2011 gaming law.

Efforts to reach George Carney, the owner of Raynham Park, were unsuccessful. He said he was in an area with bad cell service.

By sending the bill back with an amendment, Patrick leaves both himself and lawmakers with options.

The House and Senate have held their last formal session of the year, meaning if Patrick used his power to veto the bill, the branches wouldn't be able to override the decision.

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