

# Editorial: End greyhound racing

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Greyhound racing is a dying industry that Florida can do without. Recent reporting from Mary Ellen Klas at the Miami Herald further illustrates why our state should purge itself of the shady and brutal culture that has been allowed to fester at Florida's dog tracks.

The Florida Division of Parimutuel Wagering has the right to refuse or suspend licenses to dog trainers or owners who have been convicted of a felony or of abusing animals. However, like many other areas of state oversight, the rules are pointless because enforcement is almost nonexistent.

Under state law, convicted felons are prohibited from working in card rooms or casinos. Yet they can be licensed to race horses or dogs as long as they receive a flimsy waiver from the state. Klas details how one such individual received a waiver despite being "convicted of kidnapping his estranged wife at gunpoint in 1988, after taking her into the woods and sexually assaulting her." Needless to say, this is not the sort of human

who should be entrusted with the care of animals.

In her recent investigation, Klas reviewed dozens of cases and found that "in the last year, state regulators have granted 80 occupational licenses to owners and trainers who have been convicted of a host of crimes — from cocaine, heroin and amphetamine possession to assault and battery."

Furthermore, Klas found that when violations surfaced where "investigators found dogs exposed to cocaine, lacked vaccinations or showed signs of abuse," state regulators "often took years to impose a penalty... By contrast, regulators in other states, including Texas, Arizona and Arkansas, told the Herald/Times they typically close their cases within a month."

Whatever popularity there once was to greyhound racing no longer exists. There are only 21 dog tracks left in the U.S. Yet Florida is home to 13 of them, including Pensacola. It is a broken sport that exploits animals and an industry rife with seedy elements. Florida's promise to protect these animals and regulate the industry is equally broken.

This all follows up Klas' report earlier this year on the loosely investigated reporting of greyhound deaths at tracks around the state — including four in Pensacola last year, a seemingly high number given the fact that dog races do not even run year-round here.

The state should allow tracks to fully transition to slots or poker rooms and abandon this sad tradition. Legislator's like Rep. Matt Gaetz, who has been a vocal critic of state greyhound racing, should make reform a priority next session.

There is a far greater issue than gambling here — change is a moral imperative. Certainly, not all trainers or owners mistreat their animals. But there is a clearly poisonous element that has grown out of control and there is no benefit to citizens for this to continue. Quite the opposite, Florida's dog racing industry has come to be a burden on the community.

Let willing adults bet on or against each other at card tables if they so choose, but leave these dogs out of it. They have already suffered enough.

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