

THE REGISTER CITIZEN

NEWS // CONNECTICUT

Dog racing is legal, but CT could be one of the last states to ban it

By Jordan Nathaniel Fenster, *Staff writer*

March 20, 2024

Greyhound racing is, at least for now, legal in Connecticut. There are not, however, any licensed dog racing tracks in the state, and there haven't been for nearly 20 years.

"It could come back if somebody ever wanted it to, as unlikely as that might be, and there would be no law on the books preventing that," said state Rep. Mike D'Agostino, D-Hamden, who was behind the initiative.

Dog racing only existed in Connecticut for about 30 years in total. The state's first dog track, Plainfield Greyhound Park, opened in 1976. After jai alai started losing fans, a fronton became the Shoreline Star Greyhound Park in 1996. But interest in dog racing waned over the next decade, and by 2005, there was no live racing or wagering at either of those two facilities.

Christine Dorchak, president of an organization called GREY2KUSA Worldwide, which has been lobbying in this state and others to ban greyhound racing, said Connecticut was one of the last states to legalize dog racing, and is one of the last states to ban it.

"Other states had legalized the activity starting in 1931," she said. "Connecticut came very late to the game and just at that point in 1976, there were a "few good years left," but the industry had really begun its downward spiral. So it was bad timing and it was a bad experiment for the state."

Dog racing is currently illegal in 42 states and only operational in West Virginia. The current proposal would repeal the language that legalized dog racing in the Connecticut.

D'Agostino, who proposed and championed a similar bill last year, has a rescue greyhound, a former racing dog named "Veloce," which is Italian for "speed."

The bill last year passed the State House, but did not ultimately get a vote in the state Senate. "We had a unanimous vote in the Senate, and then the house speaker did not bring it up for a vote," Dorchak said. "So greyhounds have been left at the altar a couple of times. We believe that this is the year."



Veloce, a former racing greyhound, owned by state Rep. Mike D'Agostino, D-Hamden.

Submitted/Mike D'Agostino

"Greyhound racing doesn't belong in the 21st century, and I think that Connecticut is going to recognize that this year," Dorchak said.

As a racing dog, Veloce had to learn to be a member of the family.

"They spend the first part of their lives, anywhere from two to five years, in a very strange environment. It's very regimented," D'Agostino said. "They're only around other greyhounds. They live in crates. They have a schedule of eating and practice and racing, and that's it."

Dorchak said it was public awareness of treatment of the dogs that sparked the outrage that resulted in the first dog racing bans.

"They're kept in stacked metal cages for an average of 23 hours a day," she said. "They race several times a month, and that's the only time they're really allowed to be with other dogs."

Veloce, for example, did not feel comfortable sleeping outside of her crate for months after living with D'Agostino and his family, but that's changed.

"Now, years later, she sleeps on every bed in the house," he said. "Despite their speed, they are known as 40-mile-an-hour couch potatoes."