

State should get out of greyhound racing now

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West Virginia Public Radio recently did an in-depth examination of greyhound racing in the state, and it is quite apparent that the sport should be ended and the Legislature should stop subsidizing it.

In the coming year, West Virginia will be the only state in the nation with two greyhound racing tracks. Wheeling Island Casino and Track and the Mardi Gras Casino and Resort in Cross Lanes both have greyhound racing despite the rapid decline of the sport.

Arkansas will end greyhound racing next month, and Florida has already done so.

But the racing continues in West Virginia because the casinos are mandated to do so by state law.

The Legislature passed a law in 2007 that requires all casinos with table games and video lottery machines to have either greyhound or horse racing.

“Racing, either thoroughbred or greyhound, is integrally tied to their license to operate, and they have to continue live racing in order to keep the casinos going,” Del. Matt Rohrbach, R-Cabell, told WVPB.

What is difficult to comprehend is that Delaware North, an out-of-state operation that owns the two casinos in West Virginia, doesn't want racing.

The company said greyhound racing is losing money. It is seeing “fewer patrons, an older customer base and declining revenue overall.”

Delaware North said the number of racing fans has declined 60% at Wheeling Island in the last five years. It has dropped 40% at Mardi Gras.

The company said it would support legislation in West Virginia that would allow the casinos to operate without racing.

A bill passed the Legislature in 2017 that would have ended greyhound racing, but it was vetoed by Gov. Jim Justice.

It could be a different story in January, however, when the 2023 session of the Legislature begins.

GREY2K USA, a non-profit that seeks to end greyhound racing, said anti-racing lawmakers make up the majority of the Legislature now, and they want to end a dying sport that sees much of the revenues go to out-of-state interests.

The remaining lawmakers who still support greyhound racing defend it, saying it creates jobs and is a humane sport.

But how humane is it?

WVPB reports that state records show more than 600 of the dogs were injured last year, many of them suffering broken bones. And 10 dogs died.

It is quite evident that the state can no longer mandate a sport that has seen such a decline in interest. In addition, the state should end its annual subsidy of \$17 million for the greyhound racing industry.

If the owners of the casinos don't want greyhound racing, then the Legislature should reintroduce a bill to end it.

This argument has gone on for too long.

The state's casinos are already heavily regulated, and we don't think they will flounder without greyhound racing. And, by abolishing it, the casinos will have one less government mandate to deal with.