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# Bill to Unleash Greyhounds Clears Senate Committee

By: KENRIC WARD | Posted: January 27, 2012 3:55 AM



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A bill to decouple greyhound racing from dog track casinos advanced Thursday after a Senate panel rejected a "poison pill" amendment.

Senate Bill 382 cleared the Regulated Industries Committee on a 6-4 vote. The measure, by Sen. Maria Sachs, D-Delray Beach, would allow dog tracks to discontinue greyhound racing while maintaining their gaming licenses.

Prior to the final vote, Sen. Dennis Jones, R-Seminole, with support from the Greyhound Breeders Association, introduced an amendment to end state subsidies for tracks that halted racing.

Sachs called the amendment "unfriendly" and a greyhound group, Grey2K USA, branded it a "poison pill." Sachs said the amendment, if enacted with her bill, would lead to a precipitous closing of tracks.

"This is a dying business. We want to phase it out slowly," the senator said.

Jack Cory, representing greyhound breeders, countered that SB 382 amounts to "a \$7 million tax break for tracks to close down racing and move elsewhere."

Sachs said her bill, which would allow nonrunning tracks to sell their state credits to those that do, is a market-driven solution for the struggling industry.

"Tracks that wish to race will continue to race," she said.

Sen. Elyn Bogdanoff, R-Fort Lauderdale, discounted Cory's concern about relocations. She noted that state law limits a licensee's move to a 30-mile radius within the same county.

Current law requires Florida's 13 dog tracks to maintain an annual racing schedule as a condition of keeping their gaming licenses. But amid dwindling attendance at live races and rising competition in gaming, the once-healthy tracks

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say their profits have suffered.

Grey2K USA, a Massachusetts-based organization advocating for the protection of greyhounds, said Sachs' bill will help to phase out dog racing in Florida.

"On behalf of greyhound advocates around the world, GREY2K USA applauds the Senate committee in approving a common-sense measure that will give greyhounds the second chance they have been waiting for," said Christine Dorchak, president and general counsel.

"This vote is the first big step in ending the cruelty of dog racing in Florida and we are optimistic that the decoupling bill will pass in the House as well," Dorchak said.

But Cory's Greyhound group says it's most concerned about the livelihoods of the 280 breeders and 2,700 employees associated with tracks and kennel clubs around the state.

"That's a \$50 million economic impact," Cory said.

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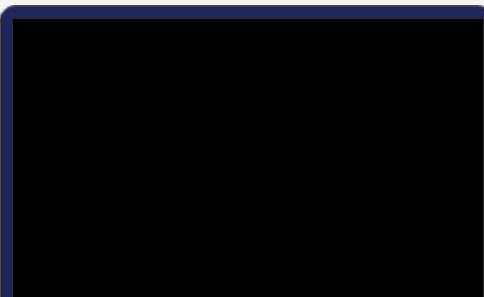
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