
Dog racing back as Kennel Club bids to save season

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Greyhound racing resumes today with the Sarasota Kennel Club appealing to state regulators for a waiver to save its season.

In May, Florida's Division of Pari-Mutuel Wagering passed new rules ordering all racetrack operators to house their dogs in metal cages instead of wood.

On Oct. 25, SKC alerted the Department of Business and Professional Regulation — which oversees Florida's pari-mutuels — to its inability to comply. As a result, an animal-rights group is calling for a shutdown of Sarasota's dog races.

“Either the state is going to give Sarasota a special favor or Sarasota's going to play by the same rules as every other track in the state,” said Carey Theil, executive director of Massachusetts-based GREY2K USA. “This is about fairness. If Sarasota gets its way, every other track in Florida should be asking DBPR for special favors.”

A DBPR spokesperson in Tallahassee said the agency was unable to comment because of the open investigation. Under Florida uniform rules and procedures, the DBPR has up to 15 days to notify the Department of State about the waiver request, followed by a “14-day comment period.”

Citing a “continuing decline in interest and revenues” industry-wide, SKC's petition for a variance stated “few suppliers of greyhound crates exist in today's marketplace.” It said the 20 crates it recently purchased from Tampa Greyhound Track were not enough.

SKC said one vendor priced metal replacement cages at \$200,000, with anticipated delivery in January 2014. Another cage fabricator quoted a \$128,400 manufacturing price with delivery next June. SKC asked for the temporary waiver “ending no earlier than July 1, 2014.”

SKC officials could not be reached for comment. But GREY2K's Theil said if the state grants the waiver, “We are prepared to challenge it.”

“The tracks in Florida have known the new rules were coming for several years now, and Sarasota has had since May to prepare for this,” Theil said. “This shows a complete disregard for state regulators, to say nothing about humane treatment of greyhounds.”



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A greyhound speeds down the track at the Sarasota Kennel Club in Sarasota. The dog track reopens today, and is seeking a waiver from new cage rules.