

South Tucson's law protecting racing dogs should stand

8 HOURS AGO

Five years after South Tucson banned steroid injections for racing greyhounds, the Arizona Department of Racing wants the city to rescind its 2008 voter initiative because it allegedly usurps the power granted to the state agency.

As reported in the Star, Department of Racing Director Bill Walsh sent a memo to South Tucson three weeks ago asking the city to revisit the measure. Not only is the department on shaky legal ground, but there is a disconnect between its stated mission to protect racing participants and its brazen request.

The South Tucson City Council should stand by the law.

It is difficult to understand how anyone would oppose these regulations. Along with banning steroids, the ordinance also prohibits the use of 4-D meat, the standard racing industry feed that gets its name from the dead, dying, disabled or diseased animals it's made from.

While animal-rights supporters say prolonged steroid use can cause liver damage, genital infections and early death, racing advocates argue that responsible use of steroids is a safe and common practice. Regrettably, Tucson Greyhound Park has acted irresponsibly in the past.

The park skirted the South Tucson ordinance by transporting dogs into Tucson, where they were legally injected until Tucson and then Pima County passed similar regulations in 2012. Past misdeeds also include the deaths of more than 100 greyhounds that went missing from the track between 2005 and 2006.

The Arizona Department of Racing's bid to void the law flies in the face of numerous examples where local ordinances are stricter than state law demands. If the state agency is serious, then it should either ask legislators to pre-empt the law or sue South Tucson, even though its standing would evidently be in doubt.

What the agency is asking is to allow the use of steroids, which can cause permanent harm to dogs and to allow the use of meat no living thing should eat to feed greyhounds.

Although the agency's motives are unclear — in an unfortunate decision by the state — the Department of Racing is now using revenue from the industry it regulates to pay employee salaries and benefits, a sure way to cast doubt on any regulator.

In asking South Tucson to overturn the law, the Department of Racing is not only missing a legal standing, it's missing a moral one as well.

SOUTH TUCSON CITY COUNCIL

The council is scheduled to discuss the issue at 6 p.m. today at 1601 S. Sixth Ave. The meeting is open to the public.