

# Bills to End Greyhound Racing Moving Forward Through State Legislature

By Chris Joseph

Published Wed., Mar. 19 2014 at 7:30 AM



A couple of bills that would force greyhound tracks to report dog injuries are making their way through the House and Senate. Meanwhile, the fight to add decoupling to the bills is also on the docket.

If decoupling can get pushed through, it could virtually end greyhound racing in Florida as we know it.

Last month, [a report revealed that 74 greyhounds died in Florida between May 31, 2013, and December 31, 2013](#). And this year alone, [18 more have perished](#) since January.

Some greyhounds were killed after being pushed into electrical wires; others died from heat stroke.

And the practice of racing greyhounds isn't hurting just the animals; it's hurting the economy as well.

Because keeping things humane for the greyhounds costs money, mixed with the fact that greyhound racing isn't as lucrative as it once was, the state lost a little more than \$3 million on greyhound racing alone last year, [according to a study by Spectrum Gaming Group](#).

Last month, James E. "Barney" O'Donnell, the man who runs greyhounds at Mardi Gras Racetrack in Hallandale Beach, [was arrested for forging a dead veterinarian's signature](#) to try to fool the state into making it look like his dogs had been properly vaccinated.

Yet, even with the multiple greyhound deaths, the loss of millions to the state, and people in the industry like O'Donnell, casinos are basically forced to keep greyhound racing as part of their gaming because of a Florida law.

Last year, thanks to greyhound advocacy groups such as Grey2K, the state's Senate Gaming Committee approved of a decoupling bill for Florida. Now the push is on to get it passed.

Currently, Florida law states that gambling is allowed only at facilities that offer racing. So tracks keep greyhound racing so they can offer lucrative slots and poker, even though they lose money on dog racing. Decoupling would allow gambling without the dog races.

Like most bills and measures, decoupling is making slow progress, and Grey2K has been urging folks to [contact their state reps or senators](#) to urge them to push for the legislation.

But Grey2K says that things are moving in the right direction.

"As we talk to lawmakers, my sense is that there's growing momentum for decoupling," Carey Theil, executive director of Grey2K USA, tells *New Times*. "We're seeing them fully come to a position of supporting decoupling. I'm optimistic."

Decoupling is something that'll likely be debated until the last possible moment, Theil says. Which is why the group is pushing this grass-roots movement to get people to get involved and make phone calls to the decisionmakers in Tallahassee.

"These next few weeks of the session are about figuring it all out," Theil says. "We're entering an important stage."

Some kind of decoupling measure would be a huge victory for those who want to see greyhound racing come to an end in Florida.

There's also a House bill calling for the industry to report injuries.

[HB933 reads:](#)

Greyhound Racing Injuries: Directs DBPR's Division of Pari-mutuel Wagering to maintain records of greyhounds injured while racing; provides for content of such records; provides penalties for making false statements on injury form.

Meanwhile, the Senate bill would not only require injury reporting but would [also fine greyhound racers for falsifying statements](#).

Meanwhile, Colorado recently [passed a bill banning greyhound racing](#) altogether.

***Send your story tips to the author, [Chris Joseph](#).***

***[Follow Chris Joseph on Twitter](#)***