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EDITORIAL

Give dogs a rest

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Florida law now requires a dog track to run at least 100 live races a year to maintain its license for a casino or card room.

The races are increasingly unpopular and unprofitable, but the tracks are forced to keep the greyhounds running if they want to stay in business.

A sensible bill sponsored by Tampa Republican state Rep. Dana Young would end the charade by "decoupling" the live race requirement from the gambling license. Race track owners, obviously, support the measure, but animal protection groups also want a change that will result in fewer races that they believe are inhumane.

While the legislation would allow tracks to emphasize their other offerings, it would contract gambling, Young stresses, not expand it. Track owners would determine how many live races should be run. Off-track simulcast racing could be offered.

The kennels that raise greyhounds understandably don't like it. But the state should not keep the requirement simply to ensure them business.

The amount wagered on live dog racing dropped by 57 percent between 2002 and 2010. The South Florida Sun Sentinel reports the Mardi Gras Casino in Hallandale Beach lost \$2.5 million on dog racing last year. Since 1990, the amount of taxes collected by the state from the races has declined by more than 96 percent, from more than \$75 million to less than \$2.7 million last year.

Animal protection groups argue the races are inhumane, with the greyhounds enduring uncomfortable confinement and frequent injuries. Because of such concerns, only seven states still allow dog racing.

The industry emphasizes the dogs are treated kindly. But the key issue here is that it makes no sense to mandate races for which there is no longer a public demand. The legislation deserves adoption.