



Everything Alabama

## **VIEWPOINTS: Bingo bill would affect fate of racing greyhounds**

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**By JENNIFER KREBS**

As the new "simple" electronic bingo bill heads for debate in the House, Alabama citizens need to be aware there are thousands of individuals affected by the bingo decision that cannot speak for themselves. As an advocate for racing greyhounds, I work to give those individuals a voice.

I write this surrounded by three of the retired racers I've adopted. They lay in peaceful repose -- long, slender limbs outstretched, eyes closed in contentment. This is the life they waited years for -- the life they deserve.

At three Alabama dog tracks, thousands of greyhounds aren't as lucky.

Since 2008, I have volunteered for a Georgia greyhound adoption group, and one of my volunteer capacities has been to travel to the Birmingham Race Course to obtain dogs for adoption. I have been in a Birmingham racing kennel three times in 18 months.

The racing kennel I visited holds between 40 and 50 dogs at any given time. The kennel building has an office at the front, and the dogs' kennel area is behind it. The stench of ammonia from dogs' urine was an overpowering greeting each time I stepped inside.

The first time I walked into the racing kennel's office, I saw a plastic bag of frozen 4-D meat thawing in a tub. (4-D meat is meat from dead, dying, diseased or downed cattle, mixed with charcoal to make it unpalatable to humans. It is fed raw to racing greyhounds.)

The kennel was filled with stacked crates, occupied by the dogs, many of whom were muzzled. They lay on thin, tattered carpet remnants. The room was dimly lit and had doors that led out to the turnout areas. The turnout areas were rectangular in shape and filled with sand -- that is where the dogs are briefly placed several times a day to relieve themselves. The chain link surrounding the turnout areas was draped with carpet remnants that had been hosed off and hung to dry.

As I walked past the kennels, pairs of eyes followed me. One dog's leg was bandaged from knee to toes. While some of the dogs sought attention, others just lay in their crates, seemingly resigned to their life of

indentured servitude.

A small television in the kennel's office played a live feed of the dog track. During one visit there, a race being broadcast ended, and a greyhound pulled up, limping, near the finish line. I closed my eyes and wondered what would become of that dog and so many others.

That racing kennel is one of many in Birmingham, Shorter and Mobile. The confinement in cages, sub-standard diet and muzzles are all standard procedure in dog racing.

At tracks across the country, greyhounds have suffered and died from injuries including broken legs, paralysis, cardiac arrest and heat stroke. And if they manage to survive the conditions and beat the odds against injury, many greyhounds still don't make it out alive, as the number retired from racing exceeds the number of adoptive homes. Many are euthanized every year, some just 2 or 3 years old, simply because they are surplus inventory.

Public interest in greyhound racing has significantly decreased. Competition from other forms of gambling, coupled with increased awareness of the sport's cruelty, has resulted in catastrophic economic decline. Dog racing now represents less than 1 percent of all wagers made annually.

Since 2001, 24 dog tracks have closed or ended live racing. But the expansion of gambling props up this dying industry and increases the public subsidy of an inhumane sport.

The proposed bingo bill would turn the Birmingham Race Course and the Mobile Greyhound Park into "racinos," just like VictoryLand.

I've hauled seven dogs from the Birmingham Race Course. That's seven dogs that made it to an adoption group and were given the chance at life in a loving home, a life that all dogs deserve. Every time I left that track with one or two greyhounds in my van, I left hundreds more behind, faced with the chance of injury and death every time they race and uncertain futures when they can no longer compete.

Please think about those dogs, and oppose the expansion of gambling in Alabama.

*Jennifer Krebs is on the board of directors of GREY2KUSA.org. Web site: [www.GREY2KUSA.org](http://www.GREY2KUSA.org).*