

GREYHOUND WELFARE/GREYHOUND ADOPTION

Mar. 6, 2015

To: Oregon House Business & Labor Committee

From: Gary Guccione, Exec. Dir., National Greyhound Assn.; Coordinator American Council, Inc.

Re: HB 2765

Based on the facts (historical and current), we respectfully, but strongly, submit that the passage of HB 2765 (to ban greyhound racing) in the Oregon legislature would be a tragic, unfair—and totally unnecessary—exercise. Here are some facts to consider.

Greyhound racing began in Oregon in the 1930s. Multnomah Greyhound Park was a solid contributor to the local business community and the social and entertainment landscape for many decades—providing jobs, tax revenue for the state and local government, while also making sizeable contributions to local charities and other worthwhile programs. It also brought visitors and tourists into the area.

Nationwide, Multnomah was viewed as the “gold standard” in greyhound racing when it came to animal welfare issues. It always gave high priority to greyhound well-being, providing a safe racing surface and excellent kennel facilities that ensured injuries were kept at a minimum, that the greyhounds were comfortable and safe. When the sport began recognizing in the early 1980s that more needed to be done to address the retirement/adoption issue, Multnomah stepped forward and established the model for the sport nationally. As Patti Lehnert (who helped lead the way with those comprehensive rules and requirements) will tell you, a “safety net” was established for all greyhounds whelped or raced in Oregon that in effect assured greyhounds were properly cared for when their racing careers ended—whether as future breeders back on their respective farms, or as future pets, placed into loving homes as “forever family members” by approved adoption agencies. I believe Patti sent you verification of this last Friday (Mar. 6).

Multnomah and greyhound racing did many positive things for Oregon and the local area for virtually a half-century. Conversely, they did nothing to embarrass or shame the state of Oregon in any way. It would be a disgraceful slap-in-the-face to the legacy left by Multnomah and the sport to now pass legislation that would “illegalize” the creditable and acceptable activity that it engaged in all those years.

As for adoption on a national scale—no less an authority that Cynthia Branigan (author of the most popular greyhound adoption book ever written, in addition to “The Reign of the Greyhound,” a history of the breed) has called the transformation of greyhound adoption in the last 25 years perhaps the greatest success story of animal welfare in any animal sport, activity or endeavor. Following the lead of such tracks as Multnomah, industry leaders made greyhound welfare and adoption their chief priorities. Thankfully,

greyhounds adapt quite easily from their lifestyle as racers to canine members of a loving family.

As a result, adoption groups that dealt solely with retired greyhound racers sprang up across the country. Racetracks, along with industry agencies such as AGC and NGA, have helped support these agencies through millions of dollars in donations. Communication and cooperation between the industry and the adoption organizations have been carefully nurtured; greyhound owners are encouraged to also contribute to the groups that take their groups, to help defray expenses. Today there are more than 300 such groups in North America. Meanwhile, the number of greyhounds bred and registered has dropped—partly due to recommendations by industry leaders for breeders to be selective in their breeding programs—from nearly 50,000 a year to less than 12,000 a year.

As a consequence of these efforts and developments, the percentage of greyhounds coming off racetracks that either go into adoption programs or are returned to the farm for retirement or to embark on new careers as parents, has now reached more 95 percent. A success story, indeed.

That success story is one that the animal rights crowd does not want you to hear. Instead, they skillfully feed legislators and the media incorrect data, outdated statistics, and sensationalized stories that have, at most, a small grain of truth to them. They “spin” isolated instances of abuse as if they are commonplace. The truth is: Greyhound racing is one of the most highly regulated, closely monitored animal sport or activity in America today.

It is extremely doubtful that greyhound racing will ever return to Oregon. Why all this attention, then? For one thing, the anti-racing animal-rights crowd wants to ban racing anywhere possible (even in non-racing states, such as Oregon) in order to embolden their efforts in other states where racing is still being conducted. In other words, they are using Oregon as a tool to further their anti-racing agenda.

To do so would be an insult to the positive legacy left by greyhound racing in Oregon. It would also be a slap in the face of the incredible efforts made by the sport in recent decades to place paramount emphasis on greyhound welfare.

Thank you for your consideration.