

February 7, 2017

House Federal and State Affairs Committee
Testimony in Support of HB 2173

Chairman Barker and Members of the Committee:

My name is Gary Guccione, and I live in Abilene, Ks. I retired in 2016 as executive director of the National Greyhound Association and as coordinator of the American Greyhound Council, having served as an officer of the NGA for 46 years (since 1971).

I wish to express my enthusiastic support of HB 2173—primarily because it will give an opportunity for live, pari-mutuel greyhound racing to return to Kansas. Aside from my personal feelings about this sport (which I've been affiliated with my entire life), the resumption of racing in Kansas will provide many tangible benefits to the people of Kansas and the state itself. The testimonies and facts provided by others with respect to HB 2173 will document in detail those benefits, which, in short summary, include: agricultural economic development (a big boost to greyhound farms in the state, which is the primary racing-greyhound producing state in America); economic growth to ancillary industries (e.g. veterinary practices, those who provide feed, equipment and infrastructure to greyhound farms); local economic development and tax benefits, both in the areas of the racetracks (e.g., motels, restaurants, etc.), as well as to the local and state governments; and—perhaps the biggest benefit of all—JOBS, JOBS, JOBS! Very simply, racetracks provide new occupation opportunities that go beyond the track itself (extending to farm help, area businesses, etc.). The outcome can only be positive.

Specifically here, I'd like to focus on the animal welfare issue, which inevitably arises whenever racing is discussed whether it's with greyhounds or with horses. As one who grew up on a greyhound farm, worked at the racetracks as a young man, and who has been directly involved for decades with this welfare issue, I can attest to you that greyhound racing is a humane endeavor. I have personally had some degree of oversight in virtually every program in the last 40 years aimed at improving all facets of animal safety and care with respect to the sport of greyhound racing.

The 1980s were a milestone decade for the sport in regard to these issues. It saw the development of a national network of independent greyhound adoption agencies. The racing industry wisely partnered with this effort, and as a result, today virtually all retired greyhound racers are either placed in the hands of the more than 300 greyhound adoption agencies that now exist in the U.S. and Canada for eventual placement into loving homes as pets; or are returned to the farms for a second career as parents of the next generation of racers. The expression of retired greyhounds being "45-mph Couch Potatoes" has become a wonderful reality in our sport, due to the cooperation between greyhound owners, greyhound tracks and greyhound adoption organizations. All entities share in this common motto: "It's all about the dogs!".

It was in 1987 that the industry formed the American Greyhound Council (AGC) to deal exclusively with all greyhound welfare issues. The biggest of those issues was greyhound adoption, and the results have been staggering. One independent adoption advocate, Cynthia Branigan, (also author of several

greyhound books) noted several years ago that greyhound adoption is “one of the greatest success stories in animal welfare history and I think it’s all due to cooperation.”

The AGC created many other programs designed to improve the care administered to greyhounds during the various stages of a greyhound’s life. Over the years, these programs and issues included: funding of national farm-inspection program, through NGA, to ensure safety and quality-of-care at the farm level (those not doing a good job were expelled from the sport by NGA); publication of the textbook “Care of the Racing & Retired Greyhound,” authored by some of the world’s leading greyhound veterinarians; production of other educational materials (videos, booklets, etc.) to aid those who administer in care of greyhounds; sponsorship of greyhound-related veterinary symposia; maintaining an international database of all research pertaining to greyhounds; direct contributions to qualifying greyhound adoption agencies (more than \$2 million donated by AGC thus far); research grants for vaccine development; support of efforts to improve racetrack surfaces to reduce injuries; support of programs advancing greyhounds being utilized as Therapy Dogs.

Our experiences have led to the conclusion that greyhounds live happy lives—whether at the farm level as they grow up, at the racetrack level, and finally in their adoptive homes as members of a loving family (Yes, greyhounds make incredible pets!) Because greyhounds are canine athletes that are intended to perform at a highly competitive level, they MUST be given the best of care and attention from the time they are born until their eventual retirement. Consequently, we have found, mostly from overseeing the inspections program and other facets of the sport that the level of care given them throughout their professional lives is of an extremely high quality. A successful racer must also be a happy and healthy greyhound that’s been given the best of care throughout his or her lifetime. Those who attempt short-cuts and deny a greyhound that at any stage in life—whether as a pup growing up on the farm, or later on in the racing kennel—cannot compete successfully in the sport, and are quickly ushered from the game.

It should be noted that greyhounds love to run. There’s nothing that makes them happier than doing what they do best—run very fast. And since racing primarily involves running, they also (obviously) love to race. Nothing excites a greyhound in a racing kennel more than the anticipation of going to the track to race. Every greyhound trainer, universally, will readily tell you that.

I am incredibly proud of what the industry has done in regard to animal welfare. I look forward to the day when the great sport of greyhound racing can return to the state that is home to the national registry, the Greyhound Hall Of Fame, and boasts of the county (Dickinson) where more greyhounds are born and raised than any other county in the United States, and of the town (Abilene) that is recognized as “The Greyhound Capital of the World.”