

February 8, 2017

House Federal and State Affairs Committee
Proponent Testimony HB 2173

Chairman Barker and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Jim Gartland. I have been involved in the pari-mutuel racing industry for 40 plus years. Most of those years were spent in management at racetrack facilities, although I did take time, occasionally, to raise and race greyhounds over the years as well. I worked at the Woodlands in Kansas City for a total of 10 years during two different time frames. During both of those periods I was involved in trying to help pass legislation to allow for additional gaming at the tracks so I am no stranger to the issues at hand. Currently, I am the Executive Director of the National Greyhound Association, headquartered in Abilene, KS, and have served in that capacity for the past nine months.

The NGA, was founded over 110 years ago (1906), and is greyhound racing's official registry, representing the greyhound owners and breeders in North America. Since 1944, the NGA has been located in Abilene. Abilene has also been home to the Greyhound Hall Of Fame since 1963. In addition, there are more greyhounds raised in Dickinson County than any other county in America—a claim the county has held since the 1970's.

Put these impressive historical facts together and you can understand why Kansas and, in particular, Abilene is popularly known in racing circles as the Greyhound Capital of the World and has proudly held that title for more than four decades. Sadly however, the one thing the Greyhound Capital of the World is missing is actual live greyhound racing.

As the official registry, the NGA records and certifies all greyhound matings, DNA registrations (certifying correct parentage), whelpings, litters, transfers, individual registrations, identification and ownership for the racing greyhound breed as well as pet greyhound ownership on this continent. The NGA also plays a major role in the greyhound adoption community as a major partner in the American Greyhound Council (AGC). Part of my job places me as the coordinator for the AGC which includes awarding grants to scores of adoption programs around the country as well as providing hauling, feed and other supplies when and where necessary in the greyhound community. The AGC in conjunction with the NGA provides full time inspectors to visit, inspect and report on greyhound farms and other facilities throughout the United States.

But serving as the sport's registry and overseer are not the NGA's only functions. Going back to 1944, when the NGA established permanent roots in Abilene, our community has been the site of semi-annual national meets, held every April and October. The week's activities include racing competition for young pups, social programs, industry meetings, Hall Of Fame induction and awards ceremonies—all capped off at the end of the week by an auction for pups and brood stock. These traditional gatherings attract as many as 600 racing aficionados from all over America—even some that make the trek from Europe and Australia. Some come to showcase and sell or lease their young pups; some come to purchase or lease pups for their racing kennels; some come for the social activities, or to see old friends. Some come because they've been coming to Abilene for 30, 40 or even 50 years or more.

The impact on our little community is huge, filling hotels and restaurants, with a significant overflow into Salina and Junction City. Hundreds of thousands of dollars—most of it out-of-state—are pumped into the local county at each NGA Meet. And it has happened every six months, year in and year out, for the last 72 years.

The auctions are a dramatic climax at each national meet—with total pup sales on occasion exceeding more than \$1.5 million. Average price per pup ranges from \$5,000 to \$9,000 from one meet to the next. The record single sale at an NGA Auction is \$80,000—the price paid for a single, untried pup raised at an Abilene farm in 2006.

Despite declines in the industry in the last ten years, the NGA Meets have remained a vibrant fixture in our sport. Just this past fall, auction purchases exceeded \$1 million dollars. There is little doubt that with the return of live racing to Kansas, interest, attendance and auction sales would grow even greater. Our next Meet is scheduled for April 24-29 and we encourage you to come and experience an NGA Meet in Abilene.

On a national perspective concerning the greyhound breeding industry—I'm happy to report that, with 2016 figures just compiled, and in spite of our state not having live racing for going on nine years, Kansas remains the leading producer of greyhound pups in the nation (followed by Texas, Iowa, Oklahoma, West Virginia and Florida). In contrast, Colorado, which was once among the top 10 states, has seen a significant decrease in the number of greyhounds raised since the state ended live racing some seven years ago. Not incidentally, the reason Colorado tracks were forced to close was the high cost of regulation and tax on the tracks.

It should be noted that Kansas didn't become the top pup producing state until after the state's tracks opened in the late 1980s. Why it has remained No. 1, even two years after the tracks have been shuttered, speaks of the great reputation Kansas' greyhound farms—with the advantage of an ideal climate, soil conditions, water, etc.—have built for producing a high percentage of top racers throughout the sport's history. But the state's breeding industry will likely face an inevitable decline unless live racing is soon restored. In just the last year we have seen several large, long standing greyhound farms closed down and sold as the opportunities for their owners to race pups has diminished. Memberships in the Kansas Greyhound Breeders Association as well as individual registrations of Kansas Bred greyhounds has dropped dramatically over the past few years based on the fading hopes of a return to racing in the Sunflower State. It would be a tragic mistake to not maximize the potential of the greyhound breeding industry that has been such an integral part of Kansas' agricultural-based landscape for more than a century. Once again, I thank you for your time and stand for any questions you may have.

Jim Gartland, Executive Director
National Greyhound Association - Abilene, KS