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Lester: Arlington Park, racing board want to chip in money to boost purses



The Arlington Million race at Arlington Park

Daily Herald File Photo



Kerry Lester

Arlington Park and others finally might have come up with a way to boost the lagging horse-racing business in Illinois, and it'll require the tracks and regulators to pony up.

The plan would call for the Illinois Racing Board to tighten its belt and contribute up to \$500,000 -- about 18 percent of its budget -- toward bigger purses for winning races next year. Arlington and Hawthorne Racecourse in Cicero, which often have been at odds, each would contribute \$500,000 toward the same effort. Horsemen might also contribute money, I'm told.

"People race for money. They come here for the purses," Illinois

Racing Board Chairman Jeff Brincat says.

State Sen. Pam Althoff of McHenry this week filed a bill that would free up the [racing board](https://www.illinois.gov/irb/Pages/default.aspx) (<https://www.illinois.gov/irb/Pages/default.aspx>) funds. It's the latest tactic after years of racing interests trying without success to get slot machines at racetracks.

Brincat, of Lake Forest, tells me the board is cutting down on out-of-town conferences and reducing the number of meetings and administrators to come up with the money.

How much?

Brincat says the change would add \$5,000 to \$10,000 to the winner's prize, which averages about \$20,000, although exact allocations haven't been determined. The races that would be targeted are in "the meat of the program on a certain day. The fifth, sixth and seventh races, ones that are going to be on the turf, which attracts more betting interests."

Des Plaines keeps lobbyist

Des Plaines officials, meanwhile, have voted to keep employing a lobbyist to fight any attempts in Springfield to allow more gambling. Aldermen last week voted 7 to 1 to keep paying lobbying firm Alfred G. Ronan, Ltd. \$60,000 a year to represent Des Plaines' interests, which include lobbying against more gambling that would dilute revenue the city gets from the Rivers Casino.

Alderman Dick Sayad criticized the move, saying Des Plaines should save money by relying on its two hometown lawmakers, state Sen. Laura Murphy and state Rep. Marty Moylan, instead of having a lobbyist on the payroll.