



March 28, 2017

The Honorable Richard Beneville
Mayor of Nome

Via e-mail: discover@gci.net

Dear Mayor Beneville,

I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and our more than 5 million members and supporters worldwide, including 13,000 in Alaska, regarding the Municipality of Nome's sponsorship of the Iditarod.

As you know, **five dogs died in less than one week at this year's race**. Given the egregious cruelty of this event—which has resulted in **the deaths of more than 150 dogs** since it began, not counting others who die during the year on chains—this should truly be the last race for dogs. We are urging the Iditarod Trail Committee to come up with a new way to preserve the historic Iditarod Trail that doesn't cause dogs to suffer and die, and we ask that you work with it to this end. You can celebrate Alaskan huskies by replacing them with cyclists, cross-country skiers, or snowmobilers. Whaling towns in New England no longer harpoon and kill whales, but they make a fortune from souvenirs and tours describing the "bad old days." Residents of Mataelpino, Spain, now run from giant polystyrene balls, instead of bulls, which takes the old "running of the bulls" tradition in a new, safer, animal-free direction. You could do something along similar lines and turn an ever-growing public relations problem into a great boon.

There's no justification for forcing dogs to run up to 100 miles per day over treacherous ice and in biting winds, blinding snowstorms, and subzero temperatures—typically, with only a few brief periods of rest. The first dog to die in this year's race, a 2-year-old named Deacon, [collapsed while running](#). After his death on March 10, two more dogs were run to death on the trail. [Four-year-old Flash](#) died from acute aspiration pneumonia, likely caused by choking on his own vomit, and [3-year-old Shilling's death](#) was attributed to extensive pulmonary edema, caused by too much fluid in the lungs. A 2-year-old named Smoke [died of hyperthermia](#) during a flight to Anchorage, and 3-year-old Groovey was [struck by a car and killed](#) after escaping from the home of his handler. These incidents are not unusual. Last year, a dog died after being hit by a snowmobile. The year prior, another was hit by a car and two died on the trail. Dog deaths at the Iditarod have become so routine that the official race rules blithely state that some dogs' deaths may be considered "unpreventable." End this old-fashioned race, and the deaths will stop.

Mushers choose to participate in the race, but dogs do not. Forcing them to run more than 1,000 miles in two weeks is grueling and often causes their paws to become bruised and bloodied, cut by ice, or completely raw. Many dogs pull or strain muscles, incur stress fractures, develop pneumonia, or are afflicted with

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intestinal viruses or bleeding stomach ulcers. On average, **only half the dogs who start the Iditarod finish the race**, and it has been reported that more than 80 percent of those who do finish sustain lung damage.

The race also causes tremendous suffering off the course. Thousands of dogs are bred to compete, but those who are not deemed fast or fit enough are usually killed—including by being bludgeoned, shot, or drowned. They spend much of their lives inside cramped, substandard kennels that are rarely, if ever, inspected by any regulatory agency. Many kennel operators keep dogs tethered on short ropes or chains. Surely, this was not the original intent of the Iditarod, but it is what the race has become.

Public opposition to the use of animals for entertainment is growing stronger and stronger. Ringling Bros. circus is closing down after 146 years, SeaWorld ended orca breeding in the face of years of declining sales and attendance, and the National Aquarium is moving all the dolphins it has held to seaside sanctuaries because it's [the right thing to do](#). Counties, states, and countries are banning wild-animal acts, making cruelty to animals a felony, and much more.

The dogs forced to race don't want to endure hardship, and they don't want to die. It's time to reinvent the Iditarod and end the suffering and death that come with it.

Yours truly,



Ingrid E. Newkirk
President
PETA