

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

HOUSE OF DELEGATES

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GENERAL LAWS
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Illegal Gambling Bill Passes House and Senate

Richmond – A bill sponsored by Delegate Glenn Oder (R – Newport News) to clarify the definition of illegal gambling has now passed the House and Senate and is awaiting the Governor’s signature. This bill amends the definition of illegal gambling to make it clear that the purchase of a product or other thing of value as a condition for an opportunity to receive a benefit through a game of chance constitutes illegal gambling. The bill is declaratory of existing law, thus clarifying that gambling in this fashion was never considered legal prior to the time of the legislation’s passage. Past prosecutions will be upheld, current prosecutions will continue, and future prosecutions will be based upon the definition of gambling contained in this bill.

Currently, some local jurisdictions are wrongly led by gambling advocates to believe that if any product, no matter how inconsequential, is offered along with an opportunity to gamble, Virginia’s gambling statute has been legally circumvented (for example, selling a 10 cent pencil for \$5 and including in the sale a “free” opportunity to gamble on an Internet game). These gambling operations, which seek to characterize themselves as legitimate sweepstakes games, are currently in operation or have operated in the following localities thus far: Warren County, Front Royal, Petersburg, Chesapeake, Danville, Emporia, Hampton, Richmond, Caroline, Spotsylvania, Virginia Beach, Roanoke, Chesterfield, and Pittsylvania.

The Newport News Planning Commission recently approved of two internet gambling casinos in the Denbigh section of Newport News. These proposals are currently awaiting action by the Newport News City Council.

“It is my hope that the passage of this bill will provide the Newport News City Council, as well as other municipalities, the tools they need to prevent internet gambling casinos from using a loophole in the law to open gambling casinos in their communities,” said Delegate Oder. “It is my hope that the passage of this bill will prevent the two casinos proposed for the Denbigh area from ever opening.”

Delegate Chris Jones (R-Suffolk), Chairman of House General Laws Committee contributed to the efforts to create and pass this legislation. Delegates Jones and Oder worked on this legislation as a reaction to the migration of internet gambling casinos from other states into Virginia.

“As other states ramped up their restrictions on internet gambling casinos, the operators of these venues decided to challenge Virginia laws by opening these casinos in our communities,” said Delegate Jones. “The passage of this new law makes it clear to our Commonwealth Attorneys that these casinos are illegal and will not be permitted in our state.”

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