

Bill to Legalize Table Games Introduced in House

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A bill that seeks to authorize table games in Delaware was filed in the House of Representatives on Friday (1/15). House Bill 310 would allow the games to be operated by "licensed video lottery (slot machines) agents." Currently, only Delaware's three horse racing tracks - Dover Downs, Delaware Park and Harrington Raceway - are authorized slot machine venues. But that could change.

A report commissioned by the state on the issue of additional legalized gambling venues recommended two additional locations. After studying the question for two months, including a survey of 500 active Delaware gamers, TMG Consulting concluded two new casinos in the northeast and southwest corners of Delaware would result in a net increase of state revenues and jobs. The report conceded the existing venues would be negatively impacted by the new locations, but not to the point of making them unviable.

However, the question of new casinos remains muddled. Earlier this week, the Video Lottery Commission, which helped commission the study, voted to oppose the recommendation it contained. Meanwhile, the Markell administration continues to favor expansion.

House Bill 310, which deals only with legalizing table games, has 27 sponsors and co-sponsors, including House Majority Leader Pete Schwartzkopf and House Minority Leader Dick Cathcart. Of the 27 legislators that have signed onto the bill, 22 are Democrats and five are Republicans, **including State Rep. Tom Kovach.**

Under HB 310, the Delaware Lottery would have the authority to determine which table games would be played and to establish regulations for their management.

The 26-page bill would also impose license fees for the operation of table games, but it cuts the operators a break, allowing them to offset up to 50-percent of the fees in exchange for capital investments made in their facilities.

Some new state bureaucracy would come along with table games, including the creation of a Lottery Commission and the establishment of a new Division of Gaming Enforcement within the Department of Safety and Homeland Security.

House Bill 310 could be considered in the House as early as next week (week of 1/18). It needs a three-fifths (60%) majority in each chamber of the General Assembly to win passage.

Some supporters of the legislation estimate table game operations could start within five months after the enactment of the bill, just in time for the start of the new fiscal year.