



Chicago Crime Commission urges Gov. Quinn to use amendatory veto on video gambling bill

By Art Bilek, Executive Vice President, Chicago Crime Commission

In the last days of this session of the General Assembly, the Senate moved to strike all wording after the enacting clause of HB 4927, a bill intended to amend the Nursing Care Act, and introduced an entirely new bill dealing with changes to the Video Gaming Act. Eleven days later, both Houses approved the completely changed HB4927 and sent it to Governor Pat Quinn for signature.

The Chicago Crime Commission is strongly opposed to this dualistic practice of stealth law making in which bills are submitted for final vote without passing through the legally required process established by the General Assembly for the presentation and review of proposed legislation. This “midnight legislation” approach has been repeatedly used by the gambling interests in Illinois to secure passage of bills that might well be amended or defeated if exposed to appropriate review, public hearings and press scrutiny.

Until their last minute submittal to the General Assembly only the gambling interests, their powerful lobbyists and their gambling-bill-friendly pet legislators who slip the bills into the legislative process in the concluding days of the sessions know the contents of these bills. This furtive and sneaky practice is a callous abrogation of the established legislative process and is wholly contrary to the best interests and commonweal of the citizens of Illinois.

For a number of years video poker machines have existed in liquor establishments in Chicago, Cook County and the rest of the state. These machines are licensed by the state department of revenue for amusement only. In reality, these machines are used mostly for gambling, the corrupt purpose for which they were designed and manufactured. State, county and local police have made thousands of arrests for gambling on these video poker machines but rarely do these arrests result in felony gambling convictions.

One section of HB 4927 prevents the Illinois Gaming Board from denying licenses to individuals who have operated or allowed to be operated so-called amusement-only video poker machines for gambling but have not been convicted of Article 28 of the Illinois Criminal Code.

The understaffed, under funded Gaming Board which will shortly be responsible for overseeing and policing the largest video poker gambling enterprise in the United States does not need restrictive legislation that ties their hands in the denial of gambling licenses to persons who have for many years conducted illegal gambling on video poker machines in their bars, taverns and roadhouses.

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It is in the best interests of this state to operate the Video Gaming Act with the highest levels of honesty and integrity. The section of HB4927 that limits the power of the Board to ensure that integrity and honesty creates a travesty of justice that allows those who have profited for many years from illegal gambling in their liquor joints to garner the profits from the new legalized video poker machines.

HB 4927 needs to be returned to the legislature for removal of the section that limits the discretionary power of the Gaming Board in the issuance of operator's licenses for video gambling machines.

We strongly urge Governor Quinn to use his amendatory veto power to stop in its tracks this outrage to public decency.

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