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Reject campaign to expand legalized gambling in Indiana

The issue: Legalization of electronic gambling in bars and liquor stores

Our opinion: Expansion of gambling is ill-advised. People who want to gamble already are able to go to the casinos, racetr

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The Indiana Licensed Beverage Association wants the state to regulate -- meaning legalize -- electronic gambling.

Among the organization's arguments is that these electronic gambling devices appear in numerous gas stations, convenience stores, truck stops, delicatessens, bait shops and other businesses around the state.

Pleading for legalization on the basis of a proliferation of ills is a curious argument.

Another argument is that the state would gain additional revenue from machines that would then be regulated by the state.

But if there are so many illegal machines in the state already, presumably because the law is not being enforced well, what effect would legalization have on the proliferation of illegal machines? Would the law then be enforced with greater zeal?

Don Marquardt, president of the association, said the excise police don't go to gas stations and mini-marts where these devices are often found because those venues are not in the excise officers' jurisdiction.

What it really comes down to is the desire by owners of liquor licenses to boost profits by legally becoming gambling parlors as well as dispensers of alcoholic beverages.

The association hopes that Indiana would allow licenses for a small number of machines, with the state raking in hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue strictly on the basis of volume.

Under existing Indiana law, the number of establishments with these machines is very limited. That was intentional.

The casinos now operating legally were intended as economic development tools for distressed

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cities.

But because of the state's fears that widespread gambling might tear the social fabric, the casinos were required to be located in riverboats, which effectively limits their size.

It is true that Indiana is facing financial difficulties, and allowing bars and liquor stores to operate these devices would generate additional revenue, but at what cost?

This expansion of gambling is ill-advised. People who want to gamble already are able to go to the casinos, racetracks or OTB parlors or just buy a lottery ticket.

Those venues and means of gambling are easier to regulate and police than to allow electronic gambling devices to proliferate in bars and liquor stores throughout the state.

The General Assembly should reject the Indiana Licenses Beverage Association's request.

Your opinion, please

Should Indiana legalize electronic gambling devices at bars and liquor stores?

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