

# **Act Now to Prevent Gambling Expansion in Bucks County**

*By Rep. Craig Staats (R-145)*

Gov. Tom Wolf recently signed a massive gambling expansion bill into law on the promise that it will substantially increase state revenue and solve Pennsylvania's fiscal challenges.

The new law legalizes internet gaming on any cell phone, tablet laptop or personal computer; and allows video gaming terminals (VGTs) at truck stops -- essentially gas stations with convenience stores. It permits gambling at international airports, and at up to 10 new satellite casinos, located 25 miles outside any existing casino; fantasy sports; and opens the door to sports betting, if ever permitted by the federal government.

I voted against **House Bill 271** because I believe expanded gambling may ultimately do more harm than good. It is widely believed that gambling expansion will not bring the level of revenue the new law anticipates, and could actually cost local governments more in enforcement costs should crime increase. It could also change the nature and character of our communities.

My greatest concern is with a provision in the law that takes local control away from Pennsylvania municipalities, leaving it to counties to opt out of VGTs or to let them in. Pennsylvania's new law allows any county with a brick-and-mortar casino, such as Bucks County, to opt out of the truck stop/VGT locations in that county. To do so, the Bucks County commissioners would have to adopt a resolution to opt out and submit a copy of the resolution to the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board by **Dec. 29, 2017**. After that deadline, the county loses the option to do so. The action can be rescinded by a county resolution in the future, but once rescinded, cannot be reinstated.

The new law does allow municipalities, located at least 25 miles away from an existing brick-and-mortar casino, to opt out of having a satellite casino. After **Dec. 31, 2017**, municipalities lose the ability to opt out. If our communities are to have any say in this matter, they must act NOW, before year's end, by passing a resolution and sending a copy to the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board.

I am concerned about the impact that expanded gambling could have here in upper Bucks County. I am also concerned that the Commonwealth will not receive the revenue from VGTs that the industry projects and that VGTs will take revenue away from the state lottery, which supports programs for older Pennsylvanians, including senior centers and prescription drug benefits in Bucks County. The proliferation of VGTs would also cut into the property tax relief taxpayers receive from Pennsylvania's existing brick-and-mortar casinos.

Unless Bucks County and municipal officials act immediately, we may be forced to accept gambling where it does not exist now, and to bear the related financial and social costs. Please take a moment to reach out to your county and municipal officials and urge them to act. We cannot choose to wait and see. The time to act is now. Inaction now means no choice later.