

COLUMBIA Bills to legalize charitable raffles are headed to the state Senate floor, but a provision that allows casino night raffles is drawing opposition to the legislation.

The Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday approved legislation allowing voters to decide whether to

allow charitable raffles and also approved a companion bill that would amend the statute and allow casino nights by non-profits if voters approve the referendum. The committee delayed action on a third bill dealing with casual gambling in homes. Tuesday's votes come after a year of hearings around the state sampling citizens thoughts on raffles, which lawmakers say are being held by many charities now even though they are illegal.

If we don't do something, people are going to continue breaking the law, said Sen. Brad Hutto, an Orangeburg Democrat. Either you support this bill or you don't. It's well thought out. It's well reasoned. This isn't opening the door for something else.

The measures would require that 90 percent of the proceeds of raffles go to a charitable cause, except in cases where a charity holds a 50-50 raffle, in which case the proceeds are evenly split between winners and a charitable cause.

Currently, the state allows charitable bingo and authorizes the sale of lottery tickets but bans any raffles, with penalties of up to a \$10,000 fine or a year in jail.

Sen. Larry Martin, a Pickens County Republican, said he opposes gambling but favors the legislation. He said every street festival in the county he has visited holds raffles, with prizes ranging from shotguns to weekend vacations.

I don't see a raffle as gambling per se, he said. This is more of a fundraising effort used by a lot of groups.

But other senators opposed the legislation, particularly the provision that allows casino nights, which allows players to win raffle tickets through other forms of gambling.

I still think casino night is not synonymous with raffles, said Sen. Phil Shoopman, a Greer Republican.

Sen. Joel Lourie, a Columbia Democrat, attempted to further limit the number of casino nights that could be held by a group, restricting raffles to two per year and casino nights to one, instead of the four raffles and two casino nights in the legislation.

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