

Policy advisers to Gov. Chris Christie want the state to loosen regulations on the Atlantic City casinos, which they say would save the state \$15 million annually money that would then be steered into a new marketing fund.

Lawmakers have challenged many of the recommendations

in a 29-page report by the Governor's Commission on Gaming, Entertainment and Sports issued in July. Easing up on regulation of the casino industry one of those recommendations also should be challenged. Legislators need to tread carefully when it comes to unraveling the current system. One would think that before the Christie administration proposed such a step, it would provide some specifics namely which regulations it wants to loosen, and why. Thus far it hasn't done so. While some regulations may be worth reviewing, without knowing exactly what the administration has in mind, it would be imprudent to move forward. Presumably, some of the diverted funds to be used to bolster Atlantic City's casinos would be aimed at luring gamblers away from New York racinos, casinos in Connecticut, the Poconos and, most recently, across the river in Philadelphia.

But chasing after tourists at the expense of reduced policing of the \$3.9 billion casino industry is an idea not yet widely embraced, for good reason.

"Weakening regulation, when New Jersey has been the gold standard of regulation in the whole world and has been that for more than a quarter century, doesn't sound like a good idea," said Carl Zeitz, a former member of the state Casino Control Commission and now an industry consultant.

New Jersey arguably has the cleanest casinos in the nation. Why mess with that? And if the governor is concerned about belt-tightening, the Casino Control Commission already has made cutbacks on its own, eliminating some 50 jobs and reducing its annual budget by more than \$5 million over the last several years.

This year's combined budget of the Casino Control Commission and the state Division of Gaming Enforcement is \$66 million. The money comes from assessments paid by the casinos and from licensing fees.

New Jersey casinos are losing revenue. But that's no reason for the state to blunt its regulatory teeth.

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