

Written by Administrator
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ANNAPOLIS, Md. (Legal Newsline) - Maryland Attorney General Doug Gansler says Penn National Gaming, which opened a slot machine casino last week in the state, is free to support a campaign against construction of a similar establishment in another county.

Gansler, in an 11-page opinion issued Tuesday, said he doesn't believe the Maryland Lottery Commission can order Penn National to stop funding

opponents of the state's largest proposed casino in Anne Arundel County.

The dispute over whether Penn National could spend money on the petition campaign had threatened to delay the opening of the state's first slots casino.

Baltimore-based Cordish Cos., which cannot build at the Arundel Mills mall unless county voters OK the plan in a referendum next month, had asked the state's lottery commission to levy hefty fines against Penn National for helping to fund a group that opposes the project, Citizens Against Slots.

Cordish Cos. claims Penn National is going against the state's interest of the prompt establishment of a casino in Anne Arundel County. Penn National, last week, opened Maryland's first casino in Cecil County.

Follow Cordish Cos.' request, the lottery commission asked for a legal opinion from Gansler's office.

Gansler on Tuesday concluded the law does not allow the lottery commission to regulate licensees' campaign contributions.

Even if it did, he wrote, a court would likely find that the First Amendment protects Penn National's "advocacy."

"Ordering (Penn National) to cease participating in the Anne Arundel referendum will not 'resolve' any alleged conflict of interest," Gansler wrote. "Nor does (Penn National's) participation in the Anne Arundel County referendum somehow create an impermissible conflict of interest where none existed before."

Penn National, in a statement following Gansler's opinion, wrote that they were "very pleased" with the attorney general's decision.

"Today is yet another win for the democratic process and the voters of Anne Arundel County," Eric Schippers, senior vice president of public affairs for Penn National, said in a statement.

"After decisively losing two court battles intended solely to prevent the upcoming referendum, The Cordish Company continues to fervently seek to silence the people of Anne Arundel County and yet again, has been instructed that they cannot stop the will of the people."

Schippers continued, "The ongoing obstructionist tactics by the Cordish Company are merely acts of desperation and bullying intended to suppress voters' wishes. Voters will make their opinion heard on Nov. 2 and we're confident they will express their belief that there is a better location in Anne Arundel County for a slots facility -- one that is not located at the mall."

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