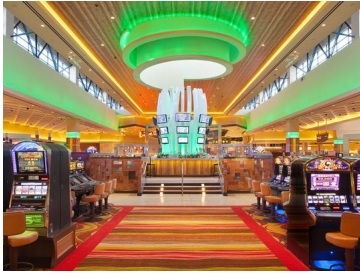


A casino in Indianapolis? Bill would allow it

Written by Administrator
Friday, 16 January 2015 13:58 -



Center bar at Indiana Live casino in Shelbyville. (Photo: J. Brough Schamp)

A Republican lawmaker's gambling legislation would clear the way for a casino in Indianapolis — or anywhere else in the state.

House Bill 1275, filed by Rep. Todd Huston of Fishers, would largely deregulate Indiana's casino industry, removing restrictions on where casinos can be built and how many may be licensed.

Huston said he isn't aware of anyone who wants to build a casino in Indianapolis, but he acknowledged that his bill would allow it.

"It would clear the way for a casino in any place where the community wants one and where an operator feels it is financially viable," he said.

The bill is a long shot at best.

Gov. Mike Pence and some legislative leaders have said they oppose any expansions of gambling. And while their definition of "expansion" isn't always clear, it's hard to see how Huston's bill could be considered anything else.

Moreover, existing casino operators would fiercely oppose the bill because it would allow new competition.

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"We have over a billion dollars invested and we've invested that in reliance on the current system," said John Keeler, vice president and general counsel for Centaur Gaming, which owns the state's two racinos in Anderson and Shelbyville. "It would be unfair to change the rules of the game midstream."

But Huston argues that increased gambling competition from surrounding states has altered the marketplace to such an extent that heavy state government involvement no longer makes sense.

"For many years we were the only game in town in the Midwest, so we could create a rather restricted environment," he said. "But as the industry changes, I think it becomes harder and harder for that state management to work."

The changes in Huston's bill wouldn't go into effect until July 1, 2024. That would give current casino operators and other stakeholders time to adjust, he said.

The bill has been assigned to the House Public Policy Committee, which means its fate rests with Chairman Tom Dermody, R-LaPorte.

He said he hasn't decided whether to give the bill a hearing, and that he is focused on narrower gambling legislation based on recommendations from a summer study committee.

That legislation would allow riverboat casinos to move onto adjacent land and would permit table games with live dealers at racinos. It would also provide tax incentives for casinos that make new capital investments.

Still, Huston is a member of the public policy committee and could seek to push Dermody's legislation in the direction of his own bill.

"I recognize it will not be very popular," Huston said. "The intent of this is to stimulate a

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discussion. What does the state want to do long term?"

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