

Valley Forge Casino vows additional measures to prevent unattended children in its parking lot

Written by Administrator

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Valley Forge Casino Resort in Montgomery County vowed Wednesday to [step up enforcement efforts](#) against parents and guardians who leave children unattended while they gamble, including the installation of first-of-its-kind infrared cameras to detect minors in parked vehicles.

Officials from the casino and its parent company, Boyd Gaming of Las Vegas, told the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board on Wednesday that they would spend \$776,000 on mitigation efforts, including upgraded signage in parking lots, food court, and hotel rooms to remind patrons that it is illegal to leave children unattended, and that adults face criminal prosecution and lifetime banishment from all Pennsylvania casinos if caught.

“This problem, as we know, really sits at the feet of very irresponsible parents,” said Adrian R. King Jr., a Ballard Spahr lawyer who represents Valley Forge. “That being said, we realize we have a responsibility to run a safe and secure property.” He said the casino officials had worked cooperatively with gaming regulators to devise a plan.

“While we can never prevent human stupidity — it seems to constantly occur — we can attempt to mitigate it and make sure that dumb decisions don’t become tragic ones,” King said.

Valley Forge has reported 22 incidents related to unattended minors during the first nine months of this year, compared with 15 during the previous three years. The increase is partly related to added training of the casino workforce to raise awareness about unattended minors, and incentivizing employees with gift certificates for reporting suspicious behavior.

“The team at Valley Forge, they’re just committed because they know it’s the right thing to do, but it’s always great to reward your team members for that,” said Ronald Bailey, the casino’s general manager since March.

In one incident in June, a customer left an infant in a vehicle and security officers broke the vehicle’s glass to rescue the child, Bailey said. The parent had to be subdued, and “that person went to jail,” Bailey said. The Pennsylvania State Police, which responds to security issues at casinos, was called.

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The gaming board praised Valley Forge and Boyd Gaming, which acquired the casino in 2018, for being proactive and voluntarily agreeing to a [formal memorandum of understanding](#) with regulators. “It has become increasingly disturbing to the board the reports of these incidents by irresponsible adults,” said Gaming Control Board Executive Director Kevin O’Toole.

The abandonment of children, mostly in vehicles, has been a persistent problem at Pennsylvania casinos. Parx Casino became the [target of action by regulators and state legislators](#) in 2011 for the behavior. Since then, 131 people have been excluded from Pennsylvania casinos for similar incidents. On Wednesday, the board took action against two parents for leaving their children in vehicles when they went in to casinos to place a sports bet.

The casino has stepped up parking area patrols by its staff and hired security teams. Bailey said the casino also has hired Upper Merion police to patrol the casino’s parking lots on Saturdays and Sundays during the football season, when sports betting activity peaks. Eight of this year’s incidents at Valley Forge involved sportsbook patrons, Bailey said.

The casino has also installed and trained infrared cameras at parking areas, which can detect the heat signature of a person inside a vehicle, even if the person is not visible through tinted glass. “We’re able to see inside cars, where traditional cameras cannot see through glass,” Bailey said.

The state plans to study the effectiveness of the infrared cameras as an enforcement tool.

“That’s something that’s new to the commonwealth,” said Cyrus Pitre, the gaming board’s chief enforcement counsel. “That’s something that they brought to our attention and that they implemented on their own without any encouragement. So I want to applaud them for putting their money where their mouth is.”

Read more <https://www.inquirer.com/business/unattended-children-casinos-pennsylvania-valley-forge-20211110.html>