

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie said he won't sign a bill that would allow smaller casinos to be built in Atlantic City before the rest of an ambitious package to rejuvenate the nation's second-largest gambling market is also approved.

The so-called "boutique

casinos" bill has passed both houses of the New Jersey legislature. Hard Rock International has said it would start drawing up blueprints for a new boardwalk casino immediately after the law is signed by the governor.

But despite their enthusiasm for Atlantic City, Christie put the brakes on the bill Monday, saying it is but one part of an overall package that Atlantic City needs to regain its competitive edge.

"I'm encouraged by what we have heard on the interest Hard Rock has in coming to Atlantic City," he said. "But Atlantic City reform has to happen as a package."

It will be at least the first week of January before the state Assembly votes on many of the bills. Christie had called on them to reconvene Monday to vote on the casino and other bills, then skewered them for refusing to do so.

"I hope that they're at least out at the stores and shopping centers of New Jersey, supporting the economy by buying Christmas presents for people and not just sitting at home," he said.

The boutique casinos bill is designed to jump-start the stalled casino market here by bringing in a new product. The main way it does this is by lowering the admission bar.

Current law requires casinos to have at least 500 hotel rooms, and the most successful ones have 2,000 or more.

But the going price for building that kind of resort has topped \$2 billion. The smaller casinos

NJ governor: No fast track for smaller casino bill - Bloomberg

Written by Administrator

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could be done for several hundred million dollars.

In return for not having to make as great an investment as their predecessors, the two new casinos authorized by the bill would be taxed at a higher rate.

Jim Allen, president of Seminole Gaming, which owns Hard Rock, did not immediately return a call seeking comment Monday. But he said when his company's plans were unveiled in March that the company wanted to move forward quickly on the project once the law was enacted.

Two other bills that are part of Christie's overall Atlantic City reform package passed Monday in the Senate. One would establish a tourism district encompassing the casinos, the marina district and the boardwalk, to be run with greater state control.

Another would reduce some of the state regulation to which the city's 11 casinos are subject.

New Jersey voters will be asked in next November's general election whether they want to approve sports betting at the state's casinos and horse tracks, if a federal ban on the activity is lifted. And a bill to measures to authorize Internet gambling in New Jersey needs a final vote in the Assembly.

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