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Md. Senate approves gambling at Rosecroft Raceway

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By: [Hayley Peterson](#)

Examiner Staff

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Maryland citizens will get to vote on whether to bring casino games — such as poker, blackjack and baccarat — to Rosecroft Raceway in Prince George's County if a bill passed by the Senate on Wednesday makes it through the House of Delegates.

The measure, which the Senate approved 34-13, would put the card games on a referendum in November.

The project would cost the state \$51 million in renovations to the Fort Washington harness racing track and \$30 million to build a casino, according to a study by the Innovation Group, a leisure and hospitality consulting firm.

The bill could face some opposition when it heads to the House later this week.

House Speaker Michael Busch has said he is against any expansion of gambling until the state gets its slots program running.

The Prince George's delegation fought against allowing slot machines in its county in 2007, when voters approved 15,000 slots at five sites across the state.

The state has yet to see a dime from the slots program, however, which lawmakers estimated would bring \$600 million in revenue annually. None of the slots sites has opened, and only three of the five locations have been licensed. The state Board of Public Works on Wednesday postponed a decision on an \$800 million contract to buy the slot machines, because no money has been allocated for the deal and the state is far from needing all 15,000 machines.

Three years after the slots vote, the Prince George's delegation is trying a different route. Table games, currently



Maryland's Senate approved a bill to allow casino games at Rosecroft Raceway. The legislation now heads to the House of Delegates. (Courtesy of rosecroft.com)

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illegal in Maryland, would bring the county nearly \$258 million in gross revenue the first year, according to the Innovation Group.

attach a \$40 fine to first-time offenses. Police can charge only those drivers who are being pulled over for another type of violation.

State Sen. C. Anthony Muse, D-Prince George's, said casino games would preserve 200 jobs — as well as add 400 positions — at the track in his district. The Innovation Group estimated table games would bring as many as 1,500 jobs to the area.

"As all of our neighboring states begin to implement cards and table games, we shouldn't be behind the learning curve again," said Muse, a sponsor of the bill with Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. Miller's family built Rosecroft in the 1940s.

West Virginia and Pennsylvania are expanding their slots programs to include table games, and Delaware is well on its way, with approval from its legislature.

hpeterson@washingtonexaminer.com

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