

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5560

As Reported By House Committee On:
Commerce & Labor

Title: An act relating to social card games.

Brief Description: Changing social card game provisions.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Commerce & Labor (originally sponsored by Senators Schow, Prentice, Snyder, Anderson and Horn).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Commerce & Labor: 3/26/97, 4/3/97 [DP].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE & LABOR

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives McMorris, Chairman; Honeyford, Vice Chairman; Conway, Ranking Minority Member; Wood, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boldt; Clements; Cole; Hatfield and Lisk.

Staff: Pam Madson (786-7166).

Background: Taverns, restaurants and other businesses primarily engaged in the sale of food and beverages may be licensed to conduct social card games approved by the Gambling Commission. The commission regulates the amount wagered, hours of operation, number of tables and the number of players per table, and the types of games that can be played.

For a social card game to qualify as legal gambling activity, the game must include certain characteristics. There must be two or more participants who are players. A player is an individual who engages on equal terms with other participants solely as contestants or bettors and where no one receives a profit from the game other than their personal winnings. The success at winning must be largely determined by the player's skill.

Social card room operators may serve as custodians of player supported progressive prize contests operated in conjunction with any card game authorized by the commission. Current law does not allow a card room operator to participate in a card game as a banker.

Summary of Bill: The definition of social card games is modified. A card room operator may be authorized by the commission to participate in card games and have an interest in the proceeds of the game. The card room operator may conduct house-banked games or player-funded banked card games if authorized by the commission.

The definition of player under the gambling laws is clarified to allow a player to pay a fee to participate in a card game if the fee is authorized by the gambling laws.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 25, 1997.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The current statute relating to social card games is outdated. The bill helps clarify the law. The bill allows the house to bank a card game, primarily blackjack. In 1989, the commission allowed a form of blackjack known as Washington blackjack. Players had to deal and bank the game in turns. This form of the game is intimidating to new players. Eventually, the commission allowed a center dealer and the player whose turn it was to deal had to sit out those hands. Last year the Legislature allowed card rooms to expand to 15 tables and allowed card room operators to take part of the pot. It also allowed player-supported jackpots. The commission is currently running a test of these new provisions with a limited number of operators who choose to be part of the test. Currently, a single player can effectively act as the banker for a blackjack game if other players do not wish to act as banker. This is a difficult situation to control. Under the bill, the house would act as the banker. The house or operator of the card room is licensed as are the employees. It allows the licensees and the Gambling Commission to better control the game from unlicensed outside influences. The house would make more money acting as the banker. The commission would still set wagering limits and establish the number of tables up to the maximum allowed under current law. This bill will allow card rooms to compete with the tribal casinos.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (pro) Steve Down, Recreational Gaming Association; Rob Saucier, Mars Hotel; and Julia Porter, Eddie's Diner. (no position) Frank Miller, Gambling Commission.