

The Bulletin

Fraternal and Social Organization

State Supreme Court Rules Skill Games Are Slot Machines; Pauses Enforcement Until October

Skill games are slot machines under Pennsylvania law and must adhere to the commonwealth's crime and gambling statutes, the state's highest court ruled in June. The ruling (<https://www.pacourts.us/assets/opinions/SUPREME/out/J-96-2025mo%20-%20106820258362749716.pdf>) orders law enforcement not to take any action for 120 days, giving the legislature a four-month window to decide whether and how to regulate the machines, which many clubs and other venues have depended on for years, despite existing in a legal gray area. An estimated 70,000 machines are operating in Pennsylvania.

Republicans who control the state Senate while Democrats who lead the state House are still reviewing the decision, and considering how to proceed when they return in fall. If the legislature fails to act, the devices would be subject to seizure by law enforcement.

Taxing skill games as part of a regulation scheme could eventually bring in more than \$1 billion annually in much-needed revenue, according to the [Independent Fiscal Office](#).

In the decision, justices combined two cases before it, and ruled on both together. The first, a 2019 case in which a bar and skill games supplier filed a petition for return of property after police seized their machines, centered on the question of whether the machines involve enough luck to be considered gambling, or enough skill that an experienced player can consistently win.

The Dauphin County Court of Common Pleas and Commonwealth Court both ruled in that case that the games are skill-based and therefore not subject to regulations for slot machines.

In the other case, Pace-O-Matic, a major skill games developer and distributor, sued the state to get a judgment about whether the games are legal. Commonwealth Court ruled the state's existing law regulating gambling doesn't apply to skill games.



Summer 2026

**Protection
Through
Legislation
Through
Education**

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In its opinion in both cases, a majority of state Supreme Court justices declared that a skill game IS a slot machine because it meets the general definition of slot machine in state statute, and whether it involves some minor element of skill is irrelevant, they said.

The justices noted that their ruling isn't necessarily the final word on skill games, and gave the General Assembly a four month window to act before enforcement begins. Now the question becomes, will the legislature act in time?

The ruling starts a 120-day clock for legislators to pass legislation legalizing, regulating, and taxing the devices, or risk a widespread law enforcement crackdown on the market. State lawmakers have tried for years to come up with a regulatory scheme for skill games, but have yet to find one that has the votes in both chambers, and would get the Governor's signature.

Though there's broad consensus that this regulation should happen and that taxation would bring the state needed revenue, a deal remains elusive. State Senate Republican leaders have said the games' proliferation is "a matter of public safety which must be addressed." The ruling means gaming reform is now a "critical piece of resolving this year's budget," they said. However, the budget passed in early July, without the issue being addressed. House Democrats and Gov. Josh Shapiro have said they are reviewing the ruling.

Perhaps the biggest issue in regulating skill games has been the inability to reach a consensus on the proper rate to tax their gross revenue. Shapiro's proposed budget this year would have set the rate at 52% to more closely align with the state's existing 55% tax on electronic games and casino slot machines. State Senate Republican leaders previously introduced a proposal for a [35% rate](#), while other Republicans [proposed a 16% tax](#). The debate became a bitter campaign issue in several Republican Senate primary campaigns, where allies of some Skill game manufacturers attacked incumbent Senators who supported the higher rate. All of those Senators survived their primaries, but the result was a negative effect on the negotiations.

Casinos support a higher tax rate for skill games, and the skills industry argues such a rate would sink them and harm the small businesses and veterans' organizations that depend on the money.

Pace-O-Matic, the skill games developer that was a plaintiff in one of the cases, said in a statement it is "disappointed with the decision" and strongly believes the ruling "does not accurately reflect the facts presented."

PFFSO members that operate skill games must push their legislators to resolve this issue when they return to session this fall.

2026 State Convention Held in Mercer County

The 2026 Federation convention is in the books, and it was a good one! Ably hosted by the Federation's Mercer County Unit, the convention saw clubpersons from all parts of the state converge on Hermitage, PA for a weekend of meetings, education and fellowship. All of the customary aspects were on full display, including the well-stocked hospitality suite, guest activities, and the always popular club tour of county clubs.

Highlighting the Saturday business meeting were presentations from local legislators, Rep. Parke Wentling and Sen. Michele Brooks. Both gave updates on important legislative issues being considered in the House and Senate, and encouraged members to contact them, and their own legislators, to make them aware of how they stand on issues such as Small Games of Chance, Skill games, veterans issues, and other relevant issues. Wentling noted his work in concert with Mercer County Unit Director Thomas "Ace" Hanzes on a local designation of a National Medical of Honor Highway on US 12.

Jason Bidish of Barr's Insurance brought the members up to speed on new insurance products available to PFFSO members, at significant discounts. These include liquor liability, directors and officers liability, and bonding, among others.

The Committees met on Friday evening, and reported at the business meeting Saturday. On behalf of the Legal/Legislative Committee, Berks County delegate Lauren Lorah reported on numerous bills the committee reviewed and announced suggested positions the Federation should take. Those were adopted.

The By-laws committee proposed an amendment to expand the membership to include some non-voting associate (corporate) membership categories. These were also approved. At the conclusion of the business meeting, members enjoyed a buffet lunch, and then boarded buses for the annual club tour. Many thanks to the following clubs for hosting: Greenville Elks, Greenville Moose, the Maennerchor Club of Sharon.

Saturday evening, the Installation and Awards Dinner was held at the Sharon Elks Lodge. At the dinner, **the new officers were sworn in by State Solicitor Jim Snell: President – Harry Leshner (Berks); First Vice President - Mike Snyder (Blair); 2nd Vice President Rick Olvitt (York); and Secretary/Treasurer- Patti Shafer (Beaver); along with the Unit directors: Rich Valko (Adams); William Guitteau (Butler); Daryl "Woody" Wood (Erie); Reed Miller (Franklin/Fulton); Mike Carmel (Lebanon); and Thomas Hanzes (Mercer). No Direct members were nominated, or elected to the Board, again this year, after 3 such seats were added to the By-laws a number of years ago.**

Several members also received "Clubperson of the Year" awards, designated by their units: **Bob Schmidt, Monaca Legion Post 580 (Beaver); Brian Mintzer, Jackson Democratic Club (Berks); Betty Richardson, Buccinese Society (Blair); Timothy Skarupski, Moniuszko Club (Erie); Melvin Boggs, Twin City Elks (Mercer); Jim Clark, Greenville VFW #3374 (Mercer); and David Lucas, Maennerchor Club Sharon (Mercer). Congratulations to all, and thanks for your service to your clubs and the community.**

Preparations are underway for the 2027 convention, to be held June 4-6, in Berks County. Mark your calendars. Details to follow!

Dukes Wins 12th district Special; House Returns to Full Complement

On August 18, voters went to the polls for a special election in Allegheny County to replace departed Republican Rep. Stephenie Scialabba in the 12th legislative district. In a significant upset, Democrat Brandon Dukes narrowly defeated Republican Scott Timko. The two will continue to run against each other again in November to serve the district next session. The registration strongly leans Timko's way, but with Dukes as an incumbent, the seat is definitely in play.

Dukes was sworn in on September 8, increasing the Democrats' majority to 103-100 for the duration of the session.

PFFSO members are encouraged to reach out to these new House members, and let them know what clubs, and the Federation, are all about. Many of these new legislators succeeded friends of the clubs, and we don't want to lose any ground in that regard.

From the PA Bulletin

NO new regulations at this time

Legislative Activity

The following bills of interest were introduced and acted upon in the General Assembly since the last Bulletin.

Charity, Small Games of Chance Bills

[SB1183](#) RE: **Auditing Thresholds for Charitable Organizations** (by Sen. Lynda Schlegel Culver, et al)

Amends the Solicitation of Funds for Charitable Purposes Act, further providing for registration of charitable organizations, financial reports, fees and failure to file. Removes the exception provisions of section 9(1) from the text. Raises the thresholds for an audit, review or compilation of the financial reports required to be submitted by charitable organizations that are registered under this act. will require every charitable organization which receives annual contributions of \$1 million or more to be audited by an independent certified public accountant. The current threshold is \$750,000. Charitable organizations which receive annual contributions of at least \$500,000, but less than \$1 million, will be required to have a review or audit of their financial statements performed by an independent certified public accountant. Charitable organizations which receive annual contributions of at least \$150,000, but less than \$500,000, shall be required to have a compilation, review or audit of their financial statements performed by an independent certified public accountant.

A compilation, audit or review will be optional for any charitable organization which receives annual contributions of less than \$150,000.

PFFSO Position: SUPPORT.

Reported as amended Senate State Government Committee, and read first time, 6/2/2026

Read second time, and re-referred to Senate Appropriations Committee, 6/8/2026

Re-reported as committed from Senate Appropriations Committee, read third time, and passed Senate, 6/22/2026 (50-0)

Referred to House State Government Committee, 6/24/2026

Clean Indoor Air Act
No action

First Responders

[HB1296](#) RE: **Contributions to the Fire Company Grant Program the Emergency Medical Services Grant Program. (by Rep. Marla Brown, et al)**

Amends Title 75 (Vehicles), in registration of vehicles, providing for contributions to the Fire Company Grant Program and for contributions to the Emergency Medical Services Grant Program. Directs the Department of Transportation to provide the ability of an applicant to make contributions to the Fire Company Grant Program. Provides for implementation. Directs the department to annually determine the total amount designated and report to the State Treasurer, who will transfer the amount from the Motor License Fund. Establishes a restricted account in the General Fund to be appropriated to the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency for the purpose of making grants. Directs the department to provide the ability of an applicant to make contributions to the Emergency Medical Services Grant Program.

PFFSO Position: SUPPORT

Reported as committed from House Transportation Committee, read first time, and re-committed to House Rules Committee, 6/16/2026

Re-reported as committed from House Rules Committee, and laid on the table, 9/9/2026

[HB2394](#) RE: **Annual Cancer Screenings for Firefighters (by Rep. Joe Ciresi, et al)**

Creates a statewide program to ensure firefighters can receive annual cancer screening examinations at no cost when those services are not covered by their health insurance. The program applies to all firefighters—career and volunteer alike—so that access to lifesaving preventive care does not depend on employment status or department size

PFFSO Position: SUPPORT

Reported as amended from House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, read first time, and re-committed to House Rules Committee, 6/10/2026

Re-reported as committed from House Rules Committee, and laid on the table, 9/9/2026

HB2446 RE: [Modernizing Fire Companies through a Transformational \\$30 Million Grant Program \(by Rep. Jim Haddock, et al\)](#)

Establishes the Fire Company Transformational Grant Program. Stipulates that the office may expend not more than \$30 million annually from the Property Tax Relief Fund for the purpose of awarding grants. Eligible applicant requirements: grants under the program shall be used to purchase equipment, renovate, modernize or construct facilities, fund retention and recruitment programs, pay staffing costs, pay for expenses related to multicompartment projects or regionalization efforts, fund projects improving operations and service delivery involving multiple fire companies or fund any other uses deemed appropriate. Outlines eligibility requirements. Provides that grants under the program shall be no less than \$100,000 and no more than \$1 million unless the applicant is composed of two or more municipal fire companies, combination fire companies or volunteer fire companies that consolidated equipment, firefighters and services within five years, in which case the grant shall not be more than \$2.5 million.

The grant period is of five years or less and is issued on a reimbursement basis, outlining exceptions. Establishes annual reporting requirements.

PFFSO Position: Neutral

Amended on House floor read second time, and re-committed to House Appropriations Committee, 6/1/2026

Re-reported as amended from House

Appropriations Committee, 6/2/2026

Read third time, and passed House, 6/8/2026

Referred to Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, 6/11/2026

HB2654 RE: Reduced Registration for Fire and EMS (by Rep. Jack Rader, et al)

Reduces the annual registration fee for volunteer fire and volunteer EMS to \$11.

PFFSO Position: No position.

Referred to House Transportation Committee, 6/22/2026

SB923 RE: Exempting Volunteer Fire and EMS Companies from the Right-to-Know Law (by Sen. Judy L. Schwank, et al)

Exempts records of a volunteer EMS company, volunteer fire company or a volunteer rescue company and volunteer firefighters' relief association from access under the provisions of the Right-to-Know Law.

PFFSO Position: No position.

Read second time, and re-referred to Senate Appropriations Committee, 6/10/2026

Re-reported as committed from Senate Appropriations Committee, 6/22/2026

Games of Skill/VGTs/Wagering

HB2557 RE: Skill Game Consumer Protection Act (by Rep. Ben Waxman, et al)

Establishes a baseline set of protections that would automatically take effect upon the enactment of future law that regulates skill games in Pennsylvania. These protections would include:

Requiring all machines to connect to a centralized monitoring system overseen by the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board.

Implementing mandatory player protections, including play-speed limits, required breaks, daily loss caps, prohibiting deceptive design features, and extending the Commonwealth's self-exclusion program to all skill game devices. Restricting placement of machines in gas stations and convenience stores.

Authorizing municipalities to limit or prohibit the placement of skill machines within their jurisdictions.

Dedicating a percentage of skill games revenue for problem gambling treatment and prevention.

PFFSO Position: No position.

Referred to House Gaming Oversight Committee, 6/1/2026

HB2631 RE: Internet Cafes (by Rep. Jason Ortity, et al)

Requires interactive gaming certificate holders, interactive gaming operators, sports wagering certificate holders and sports wagering operators to prevent registered players located within a licensed facility or within the boundaries of school property from accessing authorized interactive games or sports wagering through geospatial technologies.

PFFSO Position: No position.

Referred to House Gaming Oversight Committee, 6/1e/2026

Liquor Code Bills

HB2757 RE: Rye Whiskey (by Rep. Heather Boyd, et al)

An Act designating rye whiskey as the official State spirit of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Position: Neutral.

Referred to House Liquor Control Committee, 9/1/2026

SB1248 RE: Designating Rye Whiskey as the Official State Spirit of The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. (by Sen. Camera Bartolotta, et al)

An Act designating rye whiskey as the official state spirit of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Provides legislative findings and declarations relating to rye whiskey and its history in the commonwealth. Designates rye whiskey the official state spirit of the commonwealth.

PFFSO Position: Neutral

Reported as committed from Senate State Government Committee, and read first time, 6/30/2026

Read second time, 7/11/2026

Read third time, and passed Senate, 7/12/2026

Referred to House Liquor Control Committee, 7/12/2026

State/Local Taxes

NONE

Veterans Issues

NONE

Workforce Issues

NONE

Upcoming meetings of Interest

Some House Committee meetings and session can be viewed online at:

<http://www.pahousegop.com/>

Senate Committee meetings and session can be streamed at: <http://www.pasenategop.com/>

Remaining 2026 House Session Schedule (Subject to Change)

September 28, 29, 30

October 5, 6, 7, 19, 20, 21

November 9, 10

Remaining 2026 Senate Session Schedule

September 28, 29, 30

October 5, 6, 7, 19, 20, 21

November 17, 18

Public Meetings of the Liquor Control Board

The LCB meets twice monthly. Minutes of past meetings can be viewed at:

<https://www.lcb.pa.gov/About-Us/Board/Pages/Public-Meetings.aspx>

Public meetings commence at 11:00 AM in Room 117 of PLCB Headquarters in the Northwest Office Building in Harrisburg, PA. Meetings are open for in-person attendance, and meetings are broadcast via Microsoft Teams over internet. The telephone conference call can be accessed by dialing (267-332-8737, code 240 679 670)# to listen to these meetings.

Note: Thank you for paying your 2026 membership dues. Dues Bills for clubs and units for 2026 have been mailed at least twice, and were due May 1. Direct member dues are \$75 annually, Unit Dues are up to the County Unit. **Please note that, per the 2026 convention, 2027 dues will be \$85.** If you know a club that should be a direct or Unit member, please have them contact the PFFSO office, or direct them to the PFFSO website: www.pffso.org. All PA clubs have been mailed a solicitation to join the federation. Your help in bringing them in the fold is appreciated!

Thank you all for your continued support of the Federation. We still have a lot of work to do, and we do it better together!

Would you like to receive this Bulletin in electronic format, to speed up dissemination to other clubs? Send an email to our State Executive Director, Ted Mowatt, at: tmowatt@wannerasoc.com. Thanks.