

Casino bill heads to Pence

Written by Administrator

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Hollywood Casino & Hotel in Lawrenceburg(Photo: Charlie Nye / The Star)

Lawmakers approved gambling legislation Wednesday night that would allow riverboat casinos to move onto land but would push back live dealers for the state's two Central Indiana racinos to March 2021.

The Senate voted 36-13 and the House voted 75-11 to send the bill to Gov. Mike Pence. His office would not say Wednesday night whether he plans to sign the legislation.

The live dealers for games such as blackjack and poker have been a point of contention for Pence, who lawmakers say considers them an unwelcomed expansion of gaming.

House Public Policy Chairman Tom Dermody said House Bill 1540 would require horse track casinos in Anderson and Shelbyville to wait until March 2021 to apply with the state gaming commission for permission to add live dealers.

Right now, they are authorized to have only slot machines and electronic games.

A previous version of the bill had a January 2021 start date, but lawmakers were concerned that might overlap by several days with Pence's second term, assuming he wins one next year.

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Senate Minority Leader Tim Lanane, D-Anderson, lamented the five-year wait for human dealers.

"Best I can tell, the only reason we're not doing this is because of a threat of a veto from the governor," he said. "It's a shame we can't create hundreds of jobs in this bill."

The bill also increases a tax deduction for free play coupons that casinos use to draw in customers from \$5 million per casino to \$7 million.

The goal, Dermody said, is "to stop the continual bleeding we see in Indiana."

The measure also gives the General Assembly final say over any agreements the governor reaches with an Indian tribe that wants to build a casino in St. Joseph County. But it's unclear how much sway the state would have over the project given that it would be built on Indian land.

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