What's the Deal with Skill Games in Pennsylvania?

By Senator Rosemary Brown



The debate surrounding skill games in Pennsylvania has been ongoing for more than a decade. To understand where things stand today, it is important to look at how these machines became part of the Commonwealth's gaming landscape and the legal challenges that followed.

In 2004, Pennsylvania passed the Gaming Act, legalizing and regulating slot machines at licensed casinos. The law was expanded in 2010 to permit table games at these establishments.

Around 2014, skill-game machines began appearing in convenience stores, restaurants, bars and other businesses throughout Pennsylvania. Unlike traditional slot machines, manufacturers argued that these machines relied primarily on a player's skill rather than chance. This distinction raised a significant legal question: Are skill games considered slot machines under Pennsylvania law, or are they a separate category of devices?

In 2017, law enforcement seized skill-game machines in Philadelphia, arguing that they were illegal gambling devices operating without the required gaming licenses. In 2019, Pennsylvania State Police took additional enforcement action against an establishment operating skill game.

These actions led to years of litigation and uncertainty, with courts examining whether the machines' outcomes depended primarily on skill or chance and whether they were subject to Pennsylvania's existing gaming laws.

In 2026, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ultimately ruled that the skill-game machines at issue qualify as slot machines and are subject to the Pennsylvania Gaming Act and Crimes Code. Therefore, unlicensed operation outside of an authorized facility is illegal. The Court issued a 120-day stay before its decision takes effect, providing businesses time to respond and giving the General Assembly an opportunity to consider potential legislative changes.

This brings us to where we are today. The General Assembly must now determine how to establish a legal framework for skill games, including licensing, regulation, taxation and enforcement requirements. While there is broad agreement that these games should operate under a clear regulatory framework, parties are still working to reach consensus on the specific details.

Recently, the Governor publicly proposed taxing skill games at 52%, with the revenue directed toward funding mass transit, primarily benefiting the Philadelphia region. In contrast, legislation I co-sponsor proposes a 35% tax rate, with revenue distributed more broadly to benefit residents and communities throughout Pennsylvania, rather than being concentrated to one region of the Commonwealth.

This is just one example of the differing approaches being considered, and I remain hopeful that all parties will reach a consensus that will finally bring clarity and resolution to this decade-long issue.





Conservation Tip

By DCNR

PA. - As Halloween approaches and the pumpkins start piling up, there are plenty of ways to put them to good use without harming local ecosystems.

Instead of tossing them out or leaving them in natural areas, consider these simple, wildlife-friendly ideas to make the most of your leftover pumpkins while keeping your local habitats healthy:

Don't Dump Your Pumpkins -- Don't leave pumpkins in state parks, forests, or anywhere you don't have permission to do so.

Compost Your Pumpkins -- If you've carved a jack-o-lantern, it may already be decomposing. Because pumpkins are mostly water, they are a great addition to your compost pile. Prevent unwanted pumpkin plants by removing the seeds first.

Share Pumpkin Seeds with Wildlife -- Collect seeds from your pumpkins (before composting them) and let the seeds dry. You can scatter the seeds outside or put them in a platform feeder as a special treat (don't add salt or seasoning).

Cut Pumpkins into Pieces for Animals -- Cut your pumpkin into pieces and scatter outside as a treat for local critters. Birds will feed on the flesh of the pumpkins in addition to the seeds, as will squirrels, foxes, and deer.

Make a "Snack-o-lantern" -- Re-use your pumpkin and turn it into a pumpkin feeder! Cut the pumpkin in half and fill with birdseed. You can use sticks, dowels, and rope to hang them from trees and create a custom feeder. This works best with fresh, firm pumpkins.

Remember, not all pumpkins are safe for wildlife. Don't set out pumpkins or gourds that have been bleached, are painted, or have fake foliage or plastic decorations for wildlife, which can be toxic and harmful.

