

New Jersey senator vows fight to allow legalized sports betting in more states

Trenton, New Jersey (AP) – A New Jersey senator is vowing to fight a federal law that limits legalized sports gambling.

Sen. Raymond Lesniak said Monday that he's asked Gov. Jon S. Corzine to file suit declaring the federal law an interstate commerce violation.

The federal statute limits legalized sports betting to Delaware, Montana, Nevada and Oregon.

If Corzine doesn't take action, Lesniak – a Union County Democrat who heads a major law firm – said he'll file a lawsuit himself.

New Jersey is looking to bring professional sports betting to Atlantic City casinos and horse racing tracks, but a 1993 federal law limited legalized sports betting to the four states, though only Nevada enables it.

„Congress did more than make us second class citizens,“ Lesniak said. „It violated the Constitution of the United States of America.“

He said federal law cannot favor some states over others.

„Other states are likely to support our efforts if we take the lead,“ Lesniak said during a Senate hearing.

Corzine's office didn't immediately comment on Lesniak's request.

Jay Moyer, special counsel for the National Football League, said the federal law would withstand challenge. The NFL

opposes legalized sports betting.

„It is a losing proposition to think that you’re going to win litigation to overturn the federal law,“ Moyer said.

But Sen. Jeff Van Drew, D-Cape May, said a conservative-leaning U.S. Supreme Court could favor states’ rights.

„It is very difficult to understand how sports book could technically be legal in four states but not in 46 others,“ Van Drew said.

Proponents of sports betting in New Jersey hope it would boost visitors to Atlantic City casinos now competing with slots parlors in neighboring states.

Estimates of illegal sports gambling in the U.S. range up to USD 380 billion per year.

„Sports betting is a reality,“ Lesniak said. „Let’s put it to good use and tell Congress New Jersey will no longer allow it to discriminate against our residents.“

The Assembly earlier this year approved allowing sports wagering in Atlantic City casinos and the Meadowlands, Monmouth Park, and Freehold Raceway horse tracks.

Senators took no action Monday. Sen. Jim Whelan, D-Atlantic, said they would weigh their options, but Moyer urged them to drop the effort. Moyer said legalized sports betting creates a „corrosive climate of negativity and suspicion“ and it would lure people to illegal wagering.

„You condition people to bet on sports, you encourage it, pretty soon they’re going to realize you don’t have to go to Atlantic City to do it,“ he said.

But Whelan noted how the Delaware House recently passed a bill to develop a sports lottery by Feb. 1.

Proponents estimate USD 800 million could be wagered annually on pro sports in Atlantic City.

„This is a marketing feature,“ Whelan said.