

California to get remote caller bingo

In California, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has signed into law a bill permitting charities to organize and operate "remote caller bingo" and televised games linked electronically to hundreds of locations offering six-figure prizes.

State Bill 1369 is the subject of severe criticism due to warnings that it will cripple localized charity fundraising and lead to online casinos by the back door. The new legislation outlaws the electronic charity bingo machines that hundreds of small charities throughout the state rely on for funding.

Small charities claim that these machines are vital to community-level fundraising while "remote caller bingo" equipment, which uses the Internet to run games at multiple sites and is allowed under the new law, is too expensive to run on a local scale.

Critics also claim that the new legislation will allow California tribal casinos to expand gambling operations onto the Internet and create the greatest expansion of legal gambling in the western American state's history. This growth will, in turn, severely weaken the viability of the California Lottery as a potential source of revenue.

"There are some people talking today about what the next steps are," said Doug Bergman, President of United Cerebral Palsy of Sacramento, which nets more than us\$ 177,000 a year from bingo machines. "I'm hoping there's going to be further litigation."

However, supporters of the bill feel that some bingo machine operations are nothing more than thinly disguised gambling operations masquerading as legitimate charities. One of the

largest beneficiaries of the new legislation singled by the Republican Governor could be the Catholic Church, which stated that it would begin organizing bingo events "within a year". The Church recently revealed that revenues from its charity bingo operations had declined steadily due to the increasing popularity of Indian casinos in the state.