

Texas Poker Bill Passed By House Committee

By Martin Harris

A bill proposed by Texas State Representative Jose Menendez (D-San Antonio) designed to expand poker's availability in Texas was passed by a House committee on Thursday. The bill, titled the „Poker Gaming Act of 2009“ (H.B. 222), was passed by the House's Licensing and Administrative Procedures Committee by a vote of 6-3.

H.B. 222 represents Menendez's second attempt at introducing legislation designed to allow poker to be played in the state where texas holdem, according to poker lore, originated. Menendez's previous bill, H.B. 3186, failed to make it to a vote last year. The new bill was first introduced last November. A public hearing to discuss H.B. 222 was held on March 25th.

Before it was voted upon by the Licensing and Administrative Procedures Committee, an agreement was added that would allow local communities to vote separately on whether to legalize poker. Mike Lavigne, the Texas State Director of the Poker Players Alliance, said he expects „the vast majority of communities in Texas will hold successful elections allowing Texas hold'em at specific locations.“ Lavigne added that he believed the bill to be „a smart way to allow local control over what will quickly become an economic development issue.“

If the bill were to become law, once a community voted to legalize poker, the state would then issue licenses to particular establishments in that community allowing them to host cash games and tournaments and collect rake and fees from players. The establishments would also be required pay licensing fees to the state and taxes based on their revenue.

The Texas Lottery Commission, along with other state agencies, would handle the regulation and licensing process.

The bill also contains a provision for the creation of a poker gaming Revenue Fund designed to help contribute to the state's social services, including those involved with supporting the homeless. Additional provisions regarding limits on tournament buy-ins, bad-beat jackpots, and the allowance of electronic poker tables are included in H.B. 222 as well.

The bill now moves on to the full Texas House of Representatives where it is expected to be debated later this month.