

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July 1, 1985.

May 28, 1985

The Honorable Melvin A. Steinberg
President of the Senate
State House
Annapolis, Maryland 21404

Dear Mr. President:

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, I have today vetoed Senate Bill 774 which would have authorized limited slot machine gambling in eight Eastern Shore counties. After extensive consideration, I am convinced that neither the approach nor the goal of this legislation represent sound public policy. It establishes an unwise precedent and may lead to a serious eroding of the statewide prohibition against the possession and operation of slot machines.

Specifically, Senate Bill 774 authorizes a "bona fide fraternal, religious, or war veterans' nonprofit organization" located in any of eight Eastern Shore counties (excepting Worcester County) that has been in existence for a period of five years, to possess and operate not more than five slot machines. The bill provides for local licensing and requires that at least 50% of the proceeds from the slot machines be turned over to charity with the remainder used in furtherance of the purposes of the organization. It also sets forth certain reporting requirements to the Comptroller of the Treasury. Enforcement, except with regard to the matters related to reporting, presumably would be a local responsibility. The bill makes no provision to exclude minors from participation nor does it in any way limit participation to members of the eligible organization or their guests. Similarly there is no limit on the hours when slot machine activities would be permitted.

I have received substantial correspondence from legislators and other citizens on this bill both urging its enactment and its veto. In addition, the Town of Ocean City, though not technically covered by the bill, has requested my veto because of the fear of future pressure to include Worcester County among those counties in which slot machine gambling is permitted. Those requesting me to sign the bill argue that it is necessary as a revenue raising measure for the affected organizations and that it merely "ratifies" existing practice and "clarifies" existing law. I note, in passing, that forfeiture actions are pending at the trial level against 160 slot machines confiscated from 24 Eastern Shore clubs. In addition, at least two cases are