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Lottery to accept debit cards in January

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Players will be able to put down plastic to take their chances on scratch tickets, Mega Millions jackpots and other lottery games, beginning as early as Jan. 1.

State Treasurer Steven Grossman says he is planning to allow lottery products to be bought with debit cards, joining 33 other states that permit debit card sales for lottery tickets.

"It'll definitely boost sales," said John George, manager of N-B Mini Mart on Brock Avenue in New Bedford. "You'll have another way to pay."

Jon Carlisle, spokesman for the state treasurer, said, "Debit cards are essentially cash. This is an effort at making lottery transactions easier for our customer base."

Carlisle stressed that the change, will not include credit cards and welfare cards.

Grossman told reporters the change will make purchasing tickets more convenient for lottery customers, adding that the allowance of debit cards would likely boost sales, especially at stores where there are no ATMs.

"I think it could have a modest, positive impact on sales," Grossman said after chairing a meeting of the state Lottery Commission Tuesday.

"This is all about customer service. If you make your customer service absolutely as good as it can be, it's bound to have a positive impact on sales."

Grossman also said that agents will be trained to ensure that no lottery tickets are sold with credit cards or welfare cards.

A clerk at a BP gas station convenience store on Route 18 in New Bedford, who declined to give his name, acknowledged that "every now and then," someone will come in and try to pay for the lottery with a debit card and have to be told to produce cash or else they cannot purchase the lottery tickets.

A woman working behind the counter at Quick Mart on Brock Avenue said she had "no idea," what the change would mean for lottery sales.

"I guess we'll see what happens," she said.

Staff at Dusty's Store in downtown New Bedford declined comment.

Councilor David Alves, who is chairman of the council's gaming and casino subcommittee, said the move "shows the state is committed to gaming. They're going to tap into whatever avenue or arena they can."

Les Bernal, executive director of the Washington D.C.-based Stop Predatory Gambling, had a different reaction.

"Our reaction is that the lottery is deliberately trying to get citizens in the New Bedford area who are existing customers to lose even more money," he said.

Bernal referred to lottery as a "failed government program."

"Why is state government working to push people further into debt in these severe economic times?" he asked.

The Massachusetts Lottery generates more than \$4 billion in sales each year and pays roughly \$900 million a year in profits for local aid to cities and towns.