
Care to Revise Your Statement?

By Isaiah Thompson

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Last week, the Pennsylvania House Gaming Oversight Committee passed, just barely, a bill to the House floor that would require casinos to mail monthly "expense" (or "loss") statements to all players who use "rewards" cards. The bill was sponsored by Rep. Paul Clymer (R-Bucks), a passionate opponent of slot machines who believes such statements might alert gamblers (or their families) to self-destructive behavior. For more than five years, Clymer has tried to pass the bill through the Gaming Oversight Committee; the vote this time was 14-11, with all "yea" votes cast by House Republicans.

In related (and, until now, unpublished) news, it appears that a large number of players visit casinos not once in a while, nor once a month, nor once a week, but up to four or five times a week — just slightly less often than many people go to work.

During the Pennsylvania Gaming Congress & Mid-Atlantic Racing Forum held at the Loews Philadelphia last month, Ron Baumann, general manager of Harrah's Chester Casino, said the customers in his database visited an average of 4.5 times a week. Robert J. DeSalvio, president of Sands Casino Resort in Bethlehem, acknowledged similar if slightly lower numbers. Wendy Hamilton, general manager of SugarHouse Casino here in Philly, said that a "large number" of her casino's customers came "three, four, five times a week."

That would presumably be one scary-looking monthly expense statement, a point that even the casinos concede. In a recent committee hearing, Sands' DeSalvio told Rep. Clymer that such a statement "sorta reminds [problem gamblers] that they had a loss and it might actually encourage them to try and chase the money."

The basis of this claim?

"I have a feeling," he said, but "I can't quite pinpoint the research."