

Gambling interests spent \$20 million on NY lawmakers in 2 years, Common Cause finds

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A report says gambling interests have spent nearly \$20 million over two years on campaign contributions and lobbying in Albany.

Common Cause NY reports Friday the spending includes \$242,000 in political contributions to Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and about \$400,000 each to the campaigns of the Senate and Assembly majorities.

The spending began after Cuomo called for an expansion of casino gambling. This week, the Legislature is planning to pass a plan for four Las Vegas-type casinos upstate, two of which may be located in the Catskills, and 2,000 video slot machines on Long Island.

The plan specifically rules out casinos in Long Island, and Rockland and Westchester counties, where leaders hoped that Las Vegas-style betting would be considered for the slots-only Empire City Casino in Yonkers. The facility, built around the Yonkers Raceway harness racing track, offers patrons more than 5,000 slot machines of various styles, but no Las Vegas-style table games of the sort the new casinos would offer.

In recent years, Empire City has spent more than \$40 million on upgrades, adding more than 400 new video gaming tables, restaurants, office space and a massive carport in anticipation of additional business from expanded gambling.

Yonkers Racing spent some \$410,000 on lobbying related to racing and gambling in 2012, according to a report from the New York State Joint Commission on Public Ethics.

Taryn Duffy, a spokeswoman for the company, has declined to comment on Cuomo's proposal, but pointed out that Empire City is one of New York's most successful gaming operations, generating more than \$1.6 billion a year for schools and local governments, notably for Yonkers.

The bill sets a fall referendum for New Yorkers to decide whether to change the state constitution to allow full-fledged casinos off Indian land.

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