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The Boston Globe

Anti-gambling group sues stores over child gambling

By Jack Newsham
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A national anti-gambling group is accusing Star Market and Stop & Shop of failing to stop minors from buying lottery tickets at vending machines inside their Massachusetts stores.

The Stop Predatory Gambling Foundation sued Star Market Tuesday in Suffolk Superior Court after Cambridge city councilman Craig Kelley [filmed his 14-year-old son buying lottery tickets](#) at two of its supermarkets in September. The foundation said it filed suit after being unable to get Star to block access to the vending machines for minors.

The group made a similar request of Stop & Shop after it got the same teenager to buy a lottery ticket at a vending machine at the chain's Arlington store Monday.

Massachusetts law prohibits vendors from selling lottery tickets to people under the age of 18.

“State lotteries exploit our citizens and contribute to the rising unfairness in our society,” said Les Bernal, the national director of the Stop Predatory Gambling Foundation. “These free-standing lottery machines are a prime example. They open the door to kids becoming habitual scratch ticket users.”

Both stores declined to comment.

The Massachusetts Lottery itself isn't named in the suit. Andrew Rainer, an attorney from the Boston-based Public Health Advocacy Institute who is representing Kelley and the anti-gambling group, said there were limits on what claims could be brought against the lottery, which is run by the state.

By default, Mass Lottery machines are “unlocked,” meaning anyone can buy tickets directly from them. But Rainer said the machines can be locked with a small remote control and urged stores to verify a customer’s age before unlocking the boxes to permit a sale, as is the case with cigarette machines.

“We’d certainly welcome the involvement of the lottery commission in resolving this issue,” Rainer said. “The lottery commission does set some of the rules of engagement, such as how the machines are programmed by the lottery commission vendor.”

Christian Teja, a spokesman for the Massachusetts Lottery, said the agency would be open to playing a role in the negotiations.

“While its unusual for an unnamed party to be involved in a settlement of this type of litigation, the lottery would be glad to work with the two sides to reach a settlement that ensures lottery products are sold only to individuals 18 years of age or older,” he said.