

CHICAGO VGTs NOW

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SMALL BUSINESSES, COMMUNITY LEADERS, AND ELECTED OFFICIALS DEMAND CITY OF CHICAGO ISSUE VIDEO GAMING TERMINAL LICENSES NOW

Local businesses who are already approved by the state remain stuck in bureaucratic delay on VGT licenses

CHICAGO – Today, a broad group of Chicago business owners, community organizations, and elected officials united to demand that the City of Chicago and the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) immediately begin issuing video gaming terminal (VGT) operating licenses to approved local businesses. Although VGTs were authorized by the City Council to support the city's budget, administrative delays have prevented a single machine from operating, depriving neighborhood small businesses of vital revenue and withholding essential tax dollars from the city.

"For neighborhood establishments in North Lawndale, this delay carries severe financial consequences," said Denita Sanders, President and CEO of the Chi North Lawndale Chamber of Commerce. "Many of our local bars and restaurants are already facing significant financial stress, and this delay just adds to those challenges. VGTs would provide a crucial revenue stream, offering what we often refer to as "economical gap insurance" to our businesses that would allow them to retain staff, cover rising costs, and keep their doors open. We call on the City of Chicago to end this delay now."

During last year's budget negotiations, the Chicago City Council voted to authorize VGT operations in the city to provide local hospitality venues with much-needed assistance and generate municipal revenue. To date, the Illinois Gaming Board has reviewed and approved 65 applicants across 33 wards. However, local business owners are unable to begin operations because BACP has not awarded any operating licenses.

"Video gaming is a proven revenue generator that municipalities outside of Chicago have benefited from for years," said Sam Toia, President and CEO of the Illinois Restaurant Association. "While VGTs are not a silver bullet, they provide neighborhood restaurants and

bars with an additional revenue stream to help keep their doors open and support their workforce.”

Establishments in border neighborhoods are particularly impacted. Many of these businesses have already secured state approval and are now simply waiting on BACP to issue their municipal licenses.

“Located just a mile from the city limits, I have witnessed firsthand the negative impacts of this delay,” said Dave Supanich, owner of Lawn Magic Lounge located in Lawn Bowl. “Our family has operated this business for generations, and our customers have always been our primary focus. However, we are losing many of them to neighboring communities that offer VGTs. Our customers want them here and we want to provide them, but until the city awards our license, they will continue going to the suburbs.”

“As an alder who represents a border ward, I constantly hear from local business owners about the increasing strain of operating in Chicago,” said Alderperson Silvana Tabares, 23rd Ward. “With several neighboring municipalities already permitting VGTs, residents have plenty of opportunity to take their business elsewhere, and they do. Every day we delay costs the city revenue and penalizes our small family-owned establishments.”

VGTs have operated successfully in businesses outside of Chicago since 2012, including in municipalities with existing casinos. Without BACP approval, millions of dollars in projected tax revenue for the city remain untapped during a critical budget period.

“Chicago’s hospitality and small business community has waited too long on a promise that Mayor Johnson has failed to keep,” said Alderperson Samantha Nugent, 39th Ward. “Businesses have already invested significant time and resources into an application process for an industry approved by City Council, yet they continue to be penalized by unnecessary bureaucratic delays. This reflects a pattern typical of the current administration, and our constituents deserve better.”

While concerns have been raised that VGT licenses could divert business and revenue from the downtown casino, VGTs and casinos have coexisted successfully across the other areas of the state for years.

“By withholding these licenses, the administration is prioritizing a billion-dollar casino operator of our local economy,” said Alderperson Anthony Beale, 9th Ward. “We made a commitment to support our neighborhood businesses, yet time and time again, this administration fails to deliver. The city must end these delays, put politics aside, and fulfill its promise to the people and start issuing these licenses immediately.”

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