

# PANCO

*Pennsylvania Association of Nationally Chartered Organizations*

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## **Testimony**

**Senate Community Economic & Recreational Development Committee**

**SB 1256**

**October 6, 2020**

**Thomas W. Helsel, Jr., Secretary**

Good morning Chairman Killion and Chairman Williams. My name is Tom Helsel and I am the secretary for the PA Association of Nationally Chartered Organizations or more commonly known as PANCO. PANCO is primarily comprised of individual aeries, lodges and posts from the Fraternal Order of Eagles, Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, and Loyal Order of Moose. We also count among our membership individual posts from other nationally chartered organizations. I would like to thank the Committee for the invitation to provide testimony on SB 1256.

Our members are known for providing charitable works to their local communities. The funds raised for these works are primarily generated through the avenues of small games of chance, bingo, and other fundraising activities such as chicken BBQ's. We have worked over the years to help bring into fruition Act 67 of 1981 the Bingo Law, Act 156 of 1988 the Local Option Small Games of Chance Act, as well as subsequent acts amending these two cornerstones of our fundraising abilities. Throughout these instances we have worked with various legislators, legislative committees and other organizations to improve and enhance our members' ability to provide charitable funding for our local communities.

PANCO has been working in conjunction with other organizations seeking the ability to operate legally Video Gaming Terminals since before the onset of Act 156 of 1988. Early discussions for that Act included what would have been considered VGT's. The Legislature chose not to include them in that legislation. Since then we, along with other groups, have sought to have VGT's legalized for operation by liquor licensed establishments.

That brings us to today, the consideration of VGT's in liquor licensed establishments. PANCO supports Senator Corman's legislation SB 1256. We believe there are several elements that would ensure the safe and legal operation of VGT's, including those of games of skill, in our establishments. Such provisions as an 85% payout, the required use of redemption centers, the video surveillance and segregation of the playing area make this attractive to our members. Additionally we see the potential tax revenue for the Commonwealth as being a fair and equitable partnership with all those involved.

Our membership has been struggling to remain solvent during these trying times of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many of our members have been able to open their doors for their membership only to have their hands tied from executive orders by the Governor. Some of our members have chosen to remain closed. We are at a critical moment with our businesses. Because of the mandates in place many of our members may not or will not survive. The loss of our individual organizations detrimentally affects our local communities. Our members contribute to the community in many ways; youth sports programs, scholarships, veteran programs, contributions to local emergency service organizations (including local law enforcement), helping the disadvantaged and providing funding for medical and health charities.

While VGT's may not be the panacea to the problems caused by Covid-19, the ability to promote VGT's in our establishments will help us regain our financial footing and continue our charitable contributions. With the safeguards that are in the legislation in place, we believe that VGT's will be a successful addition as a new revenue source enabling us to continue to be a positive influence in our communities. Now more than ever is the right time to legalize VGT's for liquor licensed establishments.

Again, I would like to thank the Committee for this opportunity and look forward to any questions you may have.