



Florida Gaming Control Commission, Law Enforcement, and Prosecutors Provide Unanimous Testimony During Florida House of Representatives' Industries and Professional Activities Subcommittee: Current Statutory Framework Does Not Deter Illegal Gaming

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Last week, the Florida Gaming Control Commission reaffirmed that existing statutory classifications and penalties for illegal gaming offenses are insufficient checks on illegal gaming.

Testifying before the Florida House of Representatives' [Industries & Professional Activities Subcommittee](#), **Acting Executive Director Ross Marshman** stated, "There's only so much money to go around. If a dollar does not go to a licensed facility or a tribal facility, it's going into a criminal's pocket. It's as simple as that."

Listing the forms of lawful gaming in this state, including Florida licensed pari-mutuel facilities, cardrooms, and slot facilities, in addition to tribal gaming operations, he added: "Everyone's experience with [illegal gaming] is negative."

Alongside Marshman, on the panel were Bill Gladson, State Attorney for the Fifth Judicial Circuit; Sara Hassler, Assistant State Attorney for the Second Judicial Circuit; Chief Ed Cayenne, Homeland Security Division of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office; Chief Dan Singleton, Investigative Services of the Brevard County Sheriff's Office; and Captain Shawn Vance, Special Investigations Bureau of the Lake County Sheriff's Office.

"There is zero disincentive for these establishments to close down due to the misdemeanors that they face," **said Chief Ed Cayenne, Homeland Security Division of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office**. "They are willing to pay the fines and continue the operations because they are so profitable."

Sharing details of a two-year investigation, Operation Fish & Chips, which resulted in the arrests of 14 people and seizure of more than \$2.5 million in cash, 14 vehicles, and 52 firearms, Chief Cayenne further shared that more than 25 aggravated assaults, five robberies, and two homicides occurred during the investigation,

"These particular facilities are introducing firearms into our communities that are already seriously racked with gun crime and violent crime and gang violence," **shared Sara Hassler, Assistant State Attorney for the Second Judicial Circuit**. "In addition, these facilities are havens for collateral crime like prostitution and drug sales."

"It's a very target-rich environment," **said Captain Shawn Vance, Special Investigations Bureau of the Lake County Sheriff's Office**. "Undercover detectives have observed narcotics transactions, we have responded to robberies, we've responded and offered little help to patrons who are reporting theft or fraud when they're not getting payouts from the game room operators. We've also witnessed and had a lot of complaints about human trafficking, specifically prostitution."

"When we do execute search warrants, we have employees running out the back doors with bags of cash," **shared Chief Dan Singleton, Investigative Services of the Brevard County Sheriff's Office**. "I don't know of any other legitimate business that during normal business hours, when a law enforcement officer comes to the front door, you have an employee flee out the back with a bag of cash."

“Felonies open up greater forfeiture opportunities and search warrant opportunities,” added **Bill Gladson, State Attorney for the Fifth Judicial Circuit**.

While illegal casinos are a critical concern for law enforcement partners and prosecutors, other forms of illegal and unregulated gambling are also being investigated throughout the state and highlighted by the panelists. This includes illegal online activity, as well as unauthorized horse racing events and related illegal wagering.

“This is an area where illegal immigration is also impacting the state, specifically the horse racing industry,” said **Ross Marshman, Acting Executive Director of the Florida Gaming Control Commission**. “Florida has some of the highest purses that we can award to people racing their horses, training their horses in the state, and yet people from outside this country are here illegally, running illegal horse racing in the state. Illegal wagering is taking place on illegal horse racing.”

The Florida Gaming Control Commission was created during a 2021 Legislative Special Session and is responsible for exercising all regulatory and executive powers of the state with respect to legal gaming, including pari-mutuel wagering, cardrooms, slot machine facilities, oversight of gaming compacts, and other forms of gambling authorized by state law, excluding the lottery, as well as directly enforcing Florida’s gaming laws and combatting illegal gambling activities.

Citizen reports are important to share concerns about illegal gambling activities or facilities in Florida. Concerns can be reported online at FLGaming.gov/File-a-Report, by email at Contact@FLGaming.gov, or by phone at 850-880-3433.

The mission of the Florida Gaming Control Commission is to preserve and protect the integrity of gaming activities in Florida through fair regulation, licensing, effective criminal investigation, and enforcement.

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