

March 10, 2026

To the Honorable Members of the Alexandria, Arlington, Falls Church, and Fairfax Delegations to the General Assembly:

As legislation to legalize “skill games” continues to move forward, we urge you to preserve a clear opt-in referendum requirement in any final legislation related to these electronic gaming devices. We also believe that major decisions about expanding gaming in Virginia would benefit from the establishment of a comprehensive statewide gaming commission to provide consistent oversight and accountability.

If Virginia is going to expand gambling, the people who live in the communities where it will operate deserve the first and final say. Local governments, residents, and small businesses will ultimately bear the real-world burdens of this policy – including enforcement and public safety impacts and economic justice concerns in the neighborhoods where these machines tend to concentrate. An opt-in referendum is the only meaningful way to ensure communities have a voice before those impacts take hold.

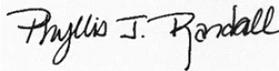
Virginia has long followed this principle. Nearly every major expansion of legalized gaming in the Commonwealth, from casinos to pari-mutuel wagering, has required local voter approval. Those referendums have consistently been opt-in, allowing gaming only where a community has affirmatively chosen to allow it. “Skill games” should not be the exception.

An opt-in referendum protects small business owners by allowing local governments to determine whether this activity should occur in their jurisdiction, rather than leaving individual entrepreneurs to navigate complex regulations and legal risk on their own. It respects community voice, particularly in working-class and immigrant neighborhoods that have historically borne the brunt of predatory business practices. And it provides accountability, giving communities the opportunity to assess whether the proposed regulatory framework and enforcement mechanisms truly protect residents, and local businesses, before these machines are introduced.

Local communities will ultimately live with the impacts of this policy. They should also have the opportunity to decide whether it belongs in their neighborhoods.

We urge you to preserve the opt-in referendum requirement in any final “skill gaming” legislation and ask that any ongoing efforts to expand gaming in Virginia benefit from the establishment of a comprehensive statewide gaming commission.

Sincerely,



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