

Jamaica's casino gaming legislation sent for signature

The Bill to legislate casino gaming in Jamaica has been sent to King's House for the Governor General's signature, having been passed by both Houses of Parliament in March.

In an interview, Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service, Senator, Senator Arthur Williams outlined the next steps to be taken, including the Finance Minister's appointment date notice in the Gazette, the establishment of the Casino Gaming Commission and the crafting and implementation of appropriate regulations.

"Now that the law has been passed, the Ministerial order is imminent," he said. However, he noted, that great care has to be taken in ensuring that the contingent regulations comprehensively address the details governing the roll-out of casino gaming in Jamaica.

He said that the major challenge is to ensure that the casinos are run according to the strict rules that are set down.

"In this regard, apart from the main legislation, detailed regulations have to be promulgated," Senator Williams said.

He noted that the experience in other countries show that regulations for the operation of casinos can run into hundreds of pages. In one jurisdiction, the regulations run into 1,800 pages, because it covers all eventualities in detail, he emphasized.

He urged Jamaicans not to lose sight of the economic benefits that can accrue from this landmark development, particularly during these challenging times.

"Casino gaming will expand our tourism product, increase earnings, generate employment and increase tax revenues. For instance the investment to build one 2,000 room hotel is some US\$1.5 billion," Senator Williams said.

According to the "Memorandum of Objects and Reasons" of the Casino Act 2010, the policy governing casino gaming in Jamaica will be done within the context of luxury integrated resort developments, of which casino gaming will be but one component. The integrated resort development concept will provide a mix of various tourism facilities, including but not limited to hotels, villas, and attractions, sporting facilities, service centres and shopping centres, the Bill pointed out.

It also states that the casino gaming component should be no more than twenty per cent of the total investment, in any approved integrated resort development.

With respect to the establishment of the Casino Gaming Commission, the legislation provides regulatory functions to that body governing the conduct of casino gaming. The Commission will have powers to grant casino gaming licences to persons to undertake casino gaming within an approved integrated resort development, as well as personal licences for specific individuals identified by the Commission as occupying management positions or carrying out operational functions in a casino.

The Commission will also be empowered to ensure that casino gaming is conducted fairly, legally and in a manner which protects children and vulnerable persons.- JIS