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By IKE MGBATOGU

Contributing Writer

COLUMBUS – Since last year, the city of Columbus has been waiting for the state to take action against the illegal gambling taking place in gaming parlors across the city.

But the state has not responded.

So, the city moved forward with its own action.

Arguing that the protection of city residents is the paramount role of government, city officials decided to embark on a legal action against some of these establishments, also known by their popular monikers, internet cafes or internet sweepstakes.

Last week, Columbus city Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer Jr. announced that his office has filed lawsuits against two internet cafes, namely Cyber Connection, located at 2617 Northland Plaza Dr., and Cyber Space, operating out of 1045 Mediterranean Ave, for what he alleged was “public nuisance” being perpetuated by these establishments.

More specifically, the lawsuit alleged that these establishments are involved in illegal gambling activities against state laws.

“We are putting these businesses on notice that we believe they are engaged in what is an illegal gambling operation,” said Pfeiffer, who went on to say, “Our intent is to put out, front and center, what type of gambling is going on because we see these games as games of chance and not games of skill.”

In these facilities, patrons are often allowed to play a game through a device that operates much like a slot-machine for a chance to win a prize, which sometimes are offered in cash. That’s illegal, alleged the lawsuit. Seemingly, while these establishments are legally allowed to be in business, they are however not supposed to operate illegal activities by deceptively permitting gambling to occur through the exploitation of a loophole in the state gaming laws.

But for the most part, this problem comes from the fact that these establishments are not regulated by the state, which in essence allows each municipality to address the issue locally. What’s more, there appears to be very little interest in passing a statewide law to tackle the problem.

Seemingly, while everyone agrees that the solution for this is to regulate these establishments, the concern comes with the recognition that doing so would bring its own tetchy conundrum

involving the ideological jitters and politicking that is always attached to that word – ‘regulation.’

But while an indecisive state continues to drag its feet on an issue that has become a big concern in Columbus, the City Council decided it was time to take action. The recent lawsuits were just some of the actions the city has taken to address this issue.

Last October, Columbus imposed a six-month moratorium on the establishment of new gaming parlors. That action also put existing establishments on notice that scrutiny of their operation will be heightened.

And recently, the council extended that moratorium by 90 days, largely in response to the swelling number of complaints being received from residents and community leaders regarding these establishments.

On top of that, council members Michelle Mills and Zack Klein warned last week that the council is considering every option to address this mess, including the possibility of doing away with these entities altogether, especially if the vacillating state remains taciturn on the issue.

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