

# NJ eyes betting on college playoff games here and elsewhere

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ATLANTIC CITY — A New Jersey lawmaker wants to allow betting on college playoff or championship games, and hopes to ask voters to amend the state Constitution next year to permit it.

If voters approve a referendum that could be on the November 2021 ballot, it would remove a significant part of New Jersey's current ban on college sports betting.

Sen. Paul Sarlo, a Democrat who represents the area including MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, where the NFL's Jets and Giants play, has introduced a bill calling for the question to be placed on next year's general election ballot.

It would allow betting on college playoff or championship games held in New Jersey, along with such games played in other states in which New Jersey teams are involved.

“These are games that are nationally televised, with a lot of interest all around the country, and a lot of people coming into the state from all over the country to witness these games,” said Sarlo. “Many of them would want to make a wager on these games, but they can't do it in New Jersey. Why should we lose out on that money?”

State Senate President Steve Sweeney, a fellow Democrat, said he will cosponsor the bill but wants to make sure it would not jeopardize the likelihood of New Jersey being awarded future college tournaments.

“I fully support what Sen. Sarlo is doing,” Sweeney said. “I just want to make sure we're not costing ourselves anything.”

New Jersey won a U.S. Supreme Court case in 2018 clearing the way for all 50 states to offer legal sports betting should they so choose.

The state Constitution bans betting on college sports held in New Jersey, or out-of-state games involving New Jersey teams.

But even with the college ban in place, there was widespread sentiment that the state would wait a few years to demonstrate that it can effectively regulate betting on pro games while maintaining the integrity of the contests, and then revisit the question of betting on college games.

That's what is happening now.

“We have proven to date that we can do this safely and responsibly,” Sarlo said.

The change would only apply to postseason games; it would maintain the ban on betting on regular season games.

It is aimed primarily at events like the NCAA basketball championship tournament, which was last held in New Jersey at Newark's Prudential Center in 2011. The arena will host one of the tournament's regional competitions in 2025.

Officials also hope MetLife Stadium will be chosen to host college football bowl games.