

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BINGO LAW

Preface:

This list of frequently asked questions is meant to address only the most common questions asked about bingo. The list is in no way intended to address all the rules and regulations that govern the conduct of Bingo, nor does it constitute legal advice. Associations that are interested in applying for a Bingo License should become familiar with the Pennsylvania Bingo Law (the Law), 10 P.S. §§301-308.1.

Q: What law governs the conduct of Bingo?

A: The Pennsylvania Bingo Law (the Law), 10 P.S. §§301-308.1, was passed in 1981. The Law allows certain nonprofit associations, known as “Associations,” to conduct Bingo for the purpose of raising funds for “Charitable” and “Civic” purposes.

Q: Who can apply for and be granted a Bingo License?

A: A license cannot be granted to an individual. Only an “association” as defined in the Bingo Law, 10 P.S. §§301-308.1, can apply. Members of interested associations should refer to §303 of the Law which can be viewed or downloaded from this site, to see if their association is eligible for licensing.

Q: Are there different types of licenses?

A: Most associations would be required to apply for a “Regular License” that allows the playing of Bingo no more than twice a week throughout the license year. Those associations that wish to conduct Bingo only once during the year may apply for and be granted a “Three Consecutive Day License” that allows the association to conduct bingo only over three consecutive days in a license year. An “Agricultural Association or County Fair” can apply for and be granted a license to conduct bingo at an exposition, carnival or fair for a period not exceeding ten days. An association or group that wishes to conduct Bingo for entertainment purposes where all prizes awarded are of “nominal value” may apply for and be granted a “Special Permit” to conduct Bingo for entertainment purposes only.

Q: What is the fee for the various licenses?

A: The fee for a regular license or a license granted to an agricultural association or county fair is \$100.00 unless the association is a recognized “senior citizens’ group” that conducts bingo for its members only in which case the fee is \$50.00. The fee for a three consecutive day license is \$15.00. There is no fee for a special permit to conduct bingo for entertainment purposes only.

Q: How long is a license valid?

A: All licenses are valid for one year from date of issue. An association applying for a three consecutive day license must specify the dates they intend to conduct bingo and an association granted a three consecutive day license cannot apply for and be granted any other bingo license for one year from the date of issue of the three consecutive day license.

Q: Can an eligible association permit its license to be used by another association to play bingo?

A: No. Only the association in whose name the license is issued may conduct bingo.

Q: Can an auxiliary to an association use the license of the licensed association to conduct bingo?

A: Yes. Auxiliary groups within associations shall be eligible to conduct bingo using the license issued to the association provided that the auxiliary group or groups are listed on the application for license and the license of the association. Regardless of which group in the association is using the license, bingo may only be played twice in any single week

Q: How does an association establish that it is an association as defined by the Law?

A: The association must meet the definition of an association found in §303 of the Law. The association must be able to prove that it has been in existence for two years prior to making application for a license. Upon making application for a Bingo License, the association's Articles of Incorporation and bylaws must accompany the application. If the association is not incorporated, it must provide its bylaws and if not expressly explained therein, a written statement by the association's President or Secretary indicating the requirements for obtaining membership in the association. The documentation that must accompany the license application can be found at the bottom of page 2 of the application.

Q: What does the association do once it has completed its application for a license and prepared the necessary accompanying documentation?

A: The application and required documentation must be brought to the Dauphin County Treasurer's office where it will be reviewed by a licensing specialist. If the application and documentation complies with the requirements of the Law, the license will be issued by the treasurer's office after payment of the applicable fee. You must allow a minimum of 15 days for the application to be processed and mailed to the applicant.

Q: Can anyone from the association bring the application and documentation to the Treasurer's Office?

A: Yes as long as they are a "bona fide member" of the association as defined by the Law and the application has been completed in its entirety, is signed by the President (Executive Officer) or Secretary of the association and the application is notarized.

Q: Will documentation that must accompany a license application be returned?

A: No, it will be filed by the Treasurer with the application and becomes public information.

Q: Must the association provide the documentation listed on Page 2 of the application each time application is made for a license.

A: Provided there have been no changes to the documentation and no lapse in the license, the documentation does not have to be provided unless specifically asked for by a County Detective. However, an application must be prepared each time a license is renewed. The completed, signed and notarized application, along with those records that the association is required to keep concerning its conduct of bingo, must be brought to the County Treasurer's Office for review.

Q: Once issued can a Bingo License be revoked?

A: Yes. The Dauphin County Treasurer can revoke a license upon recommendation of the District Attorney if it is found that grounds for revocation listed in §306 of the Law exist.

Q: Who investigates violations of the Bingo Law?

A: The district attorney is charged with investigating violations of the Law, however, any State, county or local law enforcement official is empowered to investigate violations of the Law.

Q: Do some municipalities prohibit bingo?

A: No. Unlike Local Option Small Games of Chance Act, there is no referendum requirement in the Bingo Law.

Q: Where can bingo be played?

A: Bingo, with one exception, may only be played at the association's "licensed premises" (regular place of business, or other location specifically listed on the association's application for license). Each association must list its "licensed premises" on its license application. An association may conduct bingo at the association's exposition, carnival or fair site for a period not to exceed ten days.

Q: Are their age restrictions on who can play bingo?

A: No, except that anyone under 18 years of age must be accompanied by an adult.

Q: Can anyone conduct bingo for an association?

A: No! Only a "Bona fide member" of the association as defined by the Law may conduct bingo on behalf of the association. Associations which obtain a license for the (sole) purpose of conducting bingo at an exposition, carnival or fair for a period not exceeding ten days shall be permitted to contract a charitable organization to manage, set up, supervise or participate in the operation of the bingo game provided only merchandise prizes are awarded. Only bona fide members of the contracted charitable organization shall be permitted to participate in the operation of the bingo game. If no charitable organizations are available, the association may contract an outside operator to conduct the game for merchandise at the exposition, carnival or fair site. The provisions of this paragraph shall not be construed to allow bingo games to be ordinarily carried out on a commercial basis in this Commonwealth.

Q: Can members of the association be paid or compensated for conducting bingo for the association?

A: Yes. A bona fide member may be paid up to \$50.00 per day for conducting bingo for the association. The member can be paid by check or cash, and must sign a written receipt for the payment.

Q: Can a bona fide member of the association who is under 18 years of age conduct bingo for the association?

A: Yes. A bona fide member of the association who is under 18 years of age may conduct bingo (and be compensated for conducting bingo) provided the association has written authorization from the member's parent or legal guardian.

Q: Are there restrictions on advertising bingo?

A: Yes. §305 (c) (4) of the Law states: “Only associations licensed to conduct bingo shall be permitted to advertise their bingo games. Such advertisements shall contain the date, time, location, whether cash or merchandise prizes will be awarded and the name of the association licensed to conduct the bingo game and the name of the individual in charge of the operation of the game. An association shall not advertise the prizes or their dollar value which will be awarded nor shall they advertise a guaranteed prize dollar value”.

Q: Must an association maintain records concerning its conduct of bingo?

A: Yes. §305 (c) (7) of the Law states: “Each association shall keep written records of the moneys and merchandise collected and distributed for each day they conduct bingo. These records shall indicate the total proceeds collected, the total prize money distributed, the total value of all merchandise awarded as a prize and the amount of moneys paid as rentals or wages and to whom such rentals or wages were paid. All prizes awarded having a value greater than \$250 shall be specifically described in the association's records”. In addition, §305 (c) (8) of the Law states: “Each association shall deposit with a financial institution all proceeds for each day's bingo game in an account in the association's name. This deposit shall be made before any of the proceeds may be used for any other purpose, except for payment of prize money and compensation to members employed in the operation of the game”.

Q: Are there limitations on what an association may use the proceeds of bingo for?

A: Yes. The Law permits the proceeds to be used for only “charitable purposes” or “civic purposes” as defined in §303 of the Law.

Q: Are there limits on prizes?

A: Yes there are very specific prize limits. §305 (c) (3) of the Law states: “Prizes awarded shall not exceed a value of \$250 for any one game of bingo, except for jackpot games which shall not exceed a value of \$2,000 for one such game. In addition, no more than \$4,000 in prizes shall be awarded in any calendar day”.

Q: Are there limits on how often an association can conduct bingo?

A: Yes. Bingo can be played no more than twice in any one week, except that an association may conduct bingo for a period not exceeding ten days at the association's exposition, carnival or fair site in addition to the regularly scheduled games.