

N.J. officials again ask court to legalize sports betting

By Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA – New Jersey officials resumed their fight to legalize sports betting at casinos and racetracks when a federal appeals court in Philadelphia weighed the issue for the third time on Wednesday.

Proponents hope New Jersey will be permitted to legalize sports betting to boost revenues for the state and its ailing casinos and racetracks. But they have some formidable opponents: the NCAA and the four major pro sports leagues, the NFL, NBA, NHL and Major League Baseball.

The appeals court has twice before said the New Jersey law that authorized some types of sports betting violates a federal sports protection act passed in 1992. However, the full Third Circuit Court of Appeals has agreed to rehear the last ruling by a three-judge panel. The arguments are set for late Wednesday morning.

The leagues and NCAA, in addition to arguing that federal law prohibits New Jersey's actions, have said that expanding legal sports gambling will compromise the integrity of their games and lead to more incidences of game-fixing.

Sports betting supporters have called the leagues' stance hypocritical, saying the leagues condone and profit from sports fantasy leagues in which participants assemble rosters of players from different teams and compete against

Currently, only Nevada offers betting on individual games, and Delaware offers multigame parlay betting in which players must

pick several games correctly to win. Hundreds of billions of dollars are bet illegally on sports annually.

Several court rulings in the New Jersey case have sided with the leagues and NCAA in holding that New Jersey's law repealing prohibitions against sports gambling amounts to state authorization, which conflicts with a 1992 federal law.

The state argued that two 2-1 rulings by the 3rd Circuit, one in 2013 and the other in August, offer opposing interpretations, making the issue unresolved.

In its petition for a rehearing, attorneys for the state noted that 3rd Circuit Judge Julio Fuentes wrote in his dissent from the August ruling that the two decisions are "precisely the opposite." The first held that New Jersey could repeal laws against sports betting without violating federal law, while the second held that doing so would violate it.