Poll: Nearly half in U.S. support legalized sports betting

By Wayne Parry, AP

ATLANTIC CITY — A poll finds nearly half of Americans approve of legalized sports betting, reasoning that so many people are already doing it.

The Fairleigh Dickinson University PublicMind poll released last week finds 48 percent support changing federal law to make sports betting legal throughout the country; 39 percent are opposed.

"Betting on sports does not have an access issue for anyone in the United States," said Donald Hoover, senior lecturer at the university's International School of Hospitality and Tourism Management. "Most of the sports betting in the U.S. is fairly easy to do, but happens in the shadows and in violation of federal law."

The poll comes as New Jersey opens another front in its eight-year war on a federal law restricting sports betting to those states that met a 1991 deadline to legalize it: Nevada, Oregon, Montana and Delaware.

New Jersey lawmakers have come up with another potential way around the ban involving a complex repeal of sports betting regulations in the state, followed by a limited reinstitution of restrictions. And the state's horse racing industry is asking the U.S. Supreme Court to decide the matter once and for all.

The telephone poll using cellphones and landlines to reach 1,019 adults nationwide has a margin of error of plus or minus

3.8 percentage points.

Among those in favor, the two biggest reasons given are that many people are already doing it (45 percent) and that legalized sports betting would result in increased revenue for the state (39 percent).

Among opponents, top concerns are fostering gambling addiction (55 percent); the potential involvement of organized crime (22 percent) and concerns about the perceived integrity of the games (16 percent).

"The public is divided on this issue, and it looks like the reasons behind the division stem from the age-old difficulty of reconciling the competing pulls of money and morality," said Krista Jenkins, a professor of political science and the poll's director. "People are clearly worried about the effects of gambling on individuals and their families, but also aware of the benefits that come from more money for the state from something that people are already doing."

The poll also found that although people are more supportive of legalized sports betting, they don't necessarily want more casinos: 68 percent say the U.S. currently has enough casinos, compared to 16 percent who want fewer casinos and 11 percent who want more.