Operators to air gripes on Louisiana bingo laws

GRETNA (AP) — Bingo operators will get their say about problems with Louisiana bingo laws when a legislative panel holds a hearing Monday in the Jefferson Parish Council chamber.

Small operators’ complaints about the proliferation of high-stakes games in full-time bingo parlors prompted House Speaker John A. Alario Jr. of Westwego to ask for the hearing.

It will be held jointly by the House Committee on Municipal, Parochial and Cultural Affairs and the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The committees probably will come up with plans to restrict bingo permits, Alario said.

Westwego bingo operators, a Catholic charities spokesman, bingo hall owners and law enforcement officials have been invited to testify.

At a recent hearing in Baton Rouge, Assistant Attorney General William Faust said big-stakes bingo is driving the smaller charitable games out of business.

Some unscrupulous operators rig their games to cut the number of winners and boost profits, he said.

The Legislature legalized bingo in 1968 for charitable, veterans, educational, religious, fraternal, service or civic clubs, but gave licensing power to local governments.

Some local governments, fearing that professional bingo operations are seriously hurting smaller charitable games, have recently imposed restrictions.

Earlier this month, for instance, Kenner put a moratorium on new permits. In St. Tammany Parish, the Police Jury is considering an ordinance to prohibit out-of-parish groups from holding games.

St. Tammany organizations have complained that two Jefferson Parish groups were holding high-payoff games at a new bingo parlor near Slidell. The two groups no longer operate in St. Tammany.