

## Veto No. 1988-2

HB 1729

July 7, 1988

To the Honorable, the House of Representatives  
of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania:

I have before me House Bill 1729, Printer's No. 3155, entitled "An act providing for the regulation of professional wrestlers and promoters; imposing a tax on certain receipts; requiring the posting of performance bonds; and providing penalties."

This bill would remove professional wrestling exhibitions from the control of the State Athletic Commission and would also reduce the gross receipts tax on these exhibitions from 5% to 3.5%.

While the bill does continue certain limited restrictions on wrestling promoters and contestants, the activity would become largely de-regulated. I note that this fact is contrary to the recommendations of the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee auditors in their review of the Athletic Commission under the Sunset Law of 1981. The audit report found that "continued state regulation of professional wrestling appears necessary to protect the safety and welfare of both participants and members of the audience." Information compiled by the Department of State indicates that approximately thirty other states currently regulate wrestling and several others plan to begin regulation in the near future.

Another issue raised by House Bill 1729 has to do with the age of participants in professional wrestling exhibitions. Current law prohibits minors under age eighteen from participating. Given the risk of physical injury involved, this prohibition reflects a sound public policy which should not be abandoned in a rush to de-regulate organized wrestling.

The well-known wrestling circuit is not the only activity that would be affected by a repeal of Pennsylvania's wrestling control law. This became apparent a few years ago with the sudden popularity of so-called "tough guy contests" in which contestants would attempt to knock out their opponents in a no-holds-barred fight. The General Assembly responded by defining this barbaric form of prize fighting as criminal conduct. House Bill 1729 would weaken that 1983 law as it applies to contests that can be characterized as wrestling exhibitions.

Finally, I must object to the reduction of the gross receipts tax on wrestling exhibitions in the absence of some additional source of revenue to support the other duties of the Athletic Commission which would remain after de-regulation of professional wrestling. The Department of State has undertaken a long-overdue program to reform the Commission's operations. This includes substantial improvements in the training of the Commission's regional personnel and various other steps to improve the safety of events held under the Commission's jurisdiction. House Bill 1729 would result in a revenue shortfall of approximately \$80,000 in this fiscal year, seriously inhibiting the Department and the Commission in their efforts at reform.

**For all these reasons, I must return House Bill 1729, Printer's No.3155,  
without my signature.**

**ROBERT P. CASEY**