

Patty Hymanson  
Maine Medical Association  
LD 1164

Greetings Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and Members the VLA Committee.

My name is Patty Hymanson. I live in York, am a physician and past-Maine State Representative from 2015-2022.

I am testifying in opposition to LD 1164 An Act to Create Economic Opportunity for the Wabanaki Nations Through Internet Gaming (“card game, dice game, not limited to blackjack, poker, dice, craps, roulette or baccarat”)

I am speaking as a mother of 2 boys in their 30’s who grew up in Maine and as a neurologist who practiced in- and out- patient adult neurology on the Seacoast for 28 years. Also, to be clear, I have won money at the Black Jack tables in Las Vegas and have followed my sons’s Fantasy Football journeys. I am not against gambling. But there are limits that allowing online casino games would cross.

Since Michigan legalized online casino games and sports betting in 2021, calls to the gambling addiction hotline have tripled. Two thirds of these calls are from men, 30% in their 30’s and 21% in their 40’s. (WJR.com from Detroit has a multi-series report that is worth hearing). My sons talk about how easy it is to have a phone with an app always around and how friends have been compelled to use the app too much. My son said, “There are so many things that are bad in excess. Gambling is one of them.” And then he asked “What are some other options on the table to bring revenue to Maine?” And while I don’t have a direct answer for him, allowing a strong source of addiction into our state in order to bring revenue, no matter who it goes to, should not be one of them.

As a neurologist I am aware that some brains are primed for addictions of all types. Gambling addiction is one of them. To demonstrate how physiologic this addiction is, I’ll tell you about a patient of mine with Parkinson’s Disease and gambling addiction. He liked to gamble for fun but when I started a type of medication for his Parkinson’s Disease symptoms, the gambling turned into an addiction and he lost a lot of money. Stopping the medication tamped the compulsion down. My point is that gambling addiction has a physiological component linked to neurotransmitters. It is a real entity and carries a high suicide rate because of shame, indebtedness and other harms. (Front Psychiatry, 2022, Oct 26;13:980303)

If you feel that bringing internet casino gambling into Maine is the right thing to do, which I do not, please be sure to find a funding source to identify and treat increased gambling addiction. In Maine, we do not have an adequate workforce to treat behavioral health problems as it is. Before adding Mainers and their families who will be hurt by this addiction, make sure there is a behavioral health system that can help to catch them.

Thank you for your consideration. If anyone has questions, I’ll try to answer them and find sources.