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Senator Hickman, Chair
Representative Supica, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 1838 – *An Act to Provide Opportunities and Sustainable Revenue for Maine Farms, Agricultural Fairs, Wabanaki Tribes and Veterans' Homes*

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information in opposition to LD 1838, *An Act to Provide Opportunities and Sustainable Revenue for Maine Farms, Agricultural Fairs, Wabanaki Tribes and Veterans' Homes*.

This bill authorizes the licensed operation of electronic wagering terminals to place wagers on a myriad of games of chance. It will also require an operator of an electronic wagering terminal to collect 25% of net terminal income for distribution among the General Fund, Gambling Control Unit, gambling addiction prevention and treatment services, and numerous other municipal supports.

The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) - Tobacco and Substance Use Prevention Program works to reduce problem gambling by increasing community awareness of problem gambling and gambling disorder, offering trainings and toolkits about the risks and resources surrounding problem gambling, and promoting education and resources including support groups and self-exclusion sites. There are many public health considerations, discussions, and concerns about the electronic wagering terminals proposed in this bill – known in the gambling prevention world as electronic gambling machines, or EGMs. The World Health Organization (WHO) mentions EGMs on their published Fact Sheet about Gambling, last updated at the end of 2024. The fact sheet states that “Electronic gambling machines (EGMs) and casino games are often associated with the most risk of harm.”¹ This is because the high-dopamine impact that electronic devices can have, paired with the high-dopamine impact of the activity of gambling, when paired together can lead to a higher risk of problem gambling and its related harms. This is also because, as the WHO states, EGMs “can mislead users with design features that encourage extended use,” which is a tactic we see prevalent in many electronic and online gambling forms. One study went into the specifics of these tactics, including its continuous nature, high event frequency, visual and auditory cues, price and prize structures,

¹ World Health Organization “Gambling” n.p. 2024 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/gambling>

features, and losses disguised as wins². Similarly to slot machines, another study also highlights that these terminals can cause harmful gambling practices through their design that makes perceiving the outside world or the passing of time more challenging. The experience is described as “immersive” and one that can be “trance-like” and are designed to encourage losing track of time and by the same effect, how much money has been spent³.

There are also concerns in regards to how these terminals would be regulated and how regulations would be enforced. The bill does not specify if identification will be checked before players are permitted access, or if problem gaming patterns would be observed and intercepted similarly to how these often are in other gaming and gambling settings. These concerns extend to whether someone could add themselves to a self-exclusion list if they need to for their own care, and how that self-exclusion list would be monitored or enforced. Implementation of an expansion such as this without proper staff training or capacity would complicate a legal utilization of these machines.

Maine CDC appreciates that recently proposed expansions to gambling access in Maine have been accompanied by proposed increases to allocation of funding to address the related consequences, as we know with all addictive substances and activities, increased access leads to rises in harmful outcomes. While all of the causes this bill looks to support by way of revenue are worthwhile, forms of sustainable funding that avoid simultaneously exacerbating health risks and harmful outcomes would be more easily endorsable by public health entities.

Thank you for taking the time to review our testimony. The studies and statements currently available on electronic wagering terminals/machines unanimously caution against their use because of the added level of behavior change they can affect. For this reason, the Maine CDC must caution against it as well.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions during your deliberation of this bill.

Sincerely,



Puthiery Va, DO
Director
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention
Maine Department of Health and Human Services

² Russell AMT, Browne M, Hing N, Rockloff M, Newall P, Dowling NA, Merkouris S, King DL, Stevens M, Salonen AH, Breen H, Greer N, Thorne HB, Visintin T, Rawat V, Woo L. Electronic gaming machine accessibility and gambling problems: A natural policy experiment. J Behav Addict. 2023

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10562817/#B35>

³ Schüll, Natasha Dow. Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400834655>