

George McHale
Orrington
LD 1902

To:

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica,
and Esteemed Members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

My name is George McHale. I served on the Maine Gambling Control Board from its inception in 2005 and was privileged to chair the board for several years. Throughout that time, I've been deeply involved in implementing and overseeing Maine's gaming laws, which reflect a careful balance between community benefit and responsible regulation.

A fundamental principle of Maine's commercial gaming framework has always been voter approval. Slot machines first at a harness racing track — and now casino gaming at Hollywood Casino Bangor and Oxford Casino — were not simply handed down by the Legislature; they were approved by voters on statewide and local referenda, affirming broad public support for how gaming would operate and contribute to our communities. Specifically, slot machine authorization at Bangor's track was approved by city voters in 2003, and Oxford's casino was approved in a 2010 statewide referendum. This history of direct public endorsement has been essential to maintaining community confidence in gaming policy in Maine.

The economic architecture built around this model has produced significant benefits for the state. Casino gaming contributes substantial tax revenue that is distributed to multiple state and local priorities. Harness racing, a uniquely Maine cultural and economic contributor, also directly benefits from this structure; portions of gaming revenues are designed to support purses and the broader racing ecosystem through statutory revenue allocations.

LD 1902 proposes to expand a new form of electronic gaming — "Lucky Seven" and similar machines — without the layered voter consent or the longstanding regulatory and financial guardrails that have anchored Maine's current gaming regime. Introducing another gaming format that competes for the same pool of discretionary entertainment dollars raises serious questions about unintended consequences for existing revenue streams. If customers are drawn away from the established casinos, there could be a dilution of revenue that supports harness racing purses, regulatory boards, and local shares of gaming taxes. These are not abstract concerns; they strike at the economic base that underpins rural and urban communities alike.

In cities like Bangor, tax revenues generated from casino operations have helped sustain local services and support major public-private investments, including the Cross Insurance Center. This venue continues to thrive because the economic ecosystem around it — bolstered by tourism, events, and gaming-related activity — remains sound. A move toward expanded electronic gaming without clear fiscal or regulatory safeguards risks destabilizing that ecosystem.

I support thoughtful ways to assist nonprofits and veteran causes, but not at the expense of existing structures that have been deliberately built, approved by the people of Maine, and administered with oversight designed to protect both the public and our economic priorities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to oppose LD 1902.

Thank you for your consideration.