

STATE OF MAINE

Department of Public Safety Gambling Control

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Legislative Testimony Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee

May 7th, 2025, 1 pm, Room 437, State House

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and Distinguished Members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee, I am Justin Grant, and I am here in support of LD793 "an Act to Modernize Gaming Revenue Allocations and Increase Efforts to Prevent Gambling Addiction". I am a native of Maine, and currently a grad student at Husson University, with the intent to continue onto a PhD in Psychology.

I served for ten years in the US Army, 3rd Ranger Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, a sub unit of Special Operations Command (USSOCOM)/Joint Special Operation Command (JSOC). I served as a Special Operations Combat Medic for 10 years before being forced to medically retire due to sustained injuries. Notable awards include a Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart, the coveted Ranger Tab, Combat Medical Badge, Expert field Medical Badge, Parachutist wings, and numerous other awards. I deployed 7 times, once to Iraq and 6 times to Afghanistan. During my 6th deployment, I was shot in the leg but ignored my wounds to tend to an injured comrade. You will notice this as the theme of my life in my remarks.

Currently, the Veteran Assistance Grant Fund receives only 2% of the 16% net revenue from Hollywood Casino, which equates to exactly \$202,189.24. This is about half of what the Milk Pool receives. I come with nothing but respect, but how is this acceptable? We recently ended the longest running war in American history, of which I participated in half of it. I, like many other veterans experienced a very difficult transition from service. When transitioning from the military, SM's are required to attend a bureaucratic very unprofessional week of PowerPoints on how to interview and job fairs. That is all that occurs for an endorsed transition program.

Consider the age in which someone enters service, 18-35. The human brain does not stop forming until around 30. The brain does not differentiate training from real, the amount of time spent in service, is the amount of time a young impressionable brain

believes it is at war. We condition our soldiers to kill, because it is a required function of the military. Any Internal Review Board requires a subject to go through extinction when they are conditioned to a certain behavior. There is no deconditioning program at all, we are simply released with a DD214, and told a 'good luck'.

I work as an equine specialist, where I perform and assist with Equine Assisted Services for other former special operators. These young men and women come to me absolutely SHATTERED, all having at least one serious suicide attempt. I do my best to heal them and provide them with hope. The most likely time that a former SM will commit suicide is within the first one to four years after leaving service. They carry with them intense guilt, shame, a loss of identity, and they must reconcile these issues alone. The VA tries their best, but their resources are limited and they are overwhelmed. Most services run from 8am to 5pm, excluding those who have regular work from having legitimate access to mental health services. The VA depends on non-profits to do the bulk of the work, and those non-profits rely on crowd funding to exist. We do not need social media banners and parades, we need help.

I come to you with serious pain in my heart, and I am begging you to care about those who gave so much for this country. I am tired of going to funerals of young men and women who also felt abandoned and hopeless. I am here representing so many who cannot even speak about their time in service. I implore you to set the example for other states to follow. We are not doing well, and every day 40-45 veterans are killing themselves, not the popular 22 a day campaign. If you did not know things are this bad in my community, you do now. I hope the decisions you make are ones you can sleep at night with.

Thank you for your time and consideration.