



Lewiston Auburn
METROPOLITAN
CHAMBER of COMMERCE

April 9, 2021

Honorable Louis Luchini, Senate Chair
Honorable Chris Caiazzo, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, and Members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee:

On behalf of the Lewiston Auburn Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce (LA Metro Chamber), I am submitting this letter in support of Oxford Casino & Hotel and the economic benefits it has brought to the greater LA region since its opening in 2012.

As way of background, the LA Metro Chamber is an engine for economic vitality and enhanced quality of life, and it challenges business and community to build, lead, and thrive. It is our mission to work every day to build local prosperity by encouraging a strong business community, which in turn enhances quality of life for those who live and work in the Chamber's region.

Oxford Casino & Hotel is a prime example of a business that has changed the vitality of a financially depressed region by providing incredible economic benefits in less than 10 years not only to the Town of Oxford, but to an entire region and the State as a whole. The unemployment rate was at 11 percent in Oxford County prior to the Casino's opening - that rate has been cut nearly in half to 6 percent. More than 450 employees (over 100 from Androscoggin County) worked at the Oxford Casino property (pre-pandemic), earning approximately \$14 million in wages and more than \$3 million in benefits. The property's value brings in nearly \$50 million in taxes, which pays for essential services to area residents.

Oxford Casino continues to expand, most recently adding a hotel on the property and a much-needed conference/event center. A new hotel was built across the road from the Casino and many new restaurants and business development projects have opened or are in the works all due to the popularity and foot traffic at the facility. The Oxford Casino was the lifeline needed for the people of this region to earn a good living without having to leave their hometown. But all of this economic success can change quickly.

The LA Metro Chamber is concerned about a bill before this committee that could restrict the future success of the Oxford Casino. LD 554, An Act To Create Gaming Equity And Fairness For the Native American Tribes In Maine, could allow for the expansion of gaming facilities in Maine. The potential expansion would occur not under state oversight as has been the case for current gaming operations, but under Federal oversight and processes for location selection and expansion. An expansion under a separate process could saturate Maine's gaming market and hurt the existing facilities, cost jobs, and stagnate the development we have witnessed in Oxford County. It is our fear that new Maine casinos through a separate process will shift dollars away from the Oxford Casino without bringing in any new revenue to the State. We also contend that negative impacts to the area's workforce could occur- more than 200 employees were furloughed and eventually laid off during the pandemic when the Casino was ordered closed and then only allowed to operate at 8 percent of its capacity.

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Similar scenarios are likely should a new casino be built in Southern Maine. Oxford Casino depends on stability and predictability if it is to compete, grow, and invest in the area communities. This is not the time to make changes to Maine's gaming market and regulatory structure.

On behalf of the LA Metro Chamber, I respectfully ask the Committee to think long and hard before moving forward with any proposal that will cost jobs to the people of the greater Lewiston/Auburn area and halt any future efforts to expand economic development in the region.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments in opposition to LD 554.

Sincerely,

Shanna Cox, President and CEO
Lewiston Auburn Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce

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