

John Williams, Oxford Hills Chamber of Commerce

Testimony in Opposition on LD 1164

Chairman Hickman, Chairwoman Supica, and respected members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee. My name is John Williams and I am here today on behalf of the Oxford Hills Chamber of Commerce to oppose the authorization of iGaming, which would allow every person in Maine access to a casino on their cell phone, tablet, or laptop 24 hours per day with minimal safeguards. This move would drastically alter the Maine gaming landscape without a data-driven justification for doing so. Here's my reasoning:

The people of Oxford County worked tirelessly for years to achieve approval from the legislature, the host town of Oxford, the host County of Oxford, and then the people of the state of Maine via a statewide referendum in order to have the right to even apply for a casino license. To allow the tribes, or any group, to circumvent this process for an expansion of gaming is not right, and does not respect the relationship that Oxford Casino has had with the state of Maine, generating millions of dollars for the following interests, among others:

K-12 Education
University of Maine System
Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Tribes
Maine Community College System:
Maine Harness Racing Interest

Since Oxford Casino opened, New England has seen major casinos open in Plainville, Everett, and Springfield, Massachusetts-competition is increasing all the time. Additionally, we have no idea what impact mobile sports wagering might have on Maine's two casinos, as this program was just rolled out in September. LD 1164, the allowance for a casino on every cell phone, is particularly troublesome as this plan would threaten jobs in Oxford and Penobscot County while creating no new jobs in Maine.

Casino gaming in Maine was established as a partnership with the state. The casino pays a 47 percent tax rate on net slot revenue. This is among the highest in the country, so for those that refer to an "open market" this situation is far from an open market. There are literally no other businesses in Maine paying such a tax rate.

In sum, there are three things I'd like to reiterate:

- Gaming expansion of this scale should be done by a statewide vote with local approval
- This bill will absolutely threaten jobs at the facilities in Bangor and Oxford
- The two Maine casinos have a healthy, steady partnership with the State of Maine to support a range of under-funded programs, including K-12 education.

I realize that there is a desire to be helpful to the people of Maine's first nations and I appreciate those efforts, but I respectfully ask that this committee look for creative ways to support the Maine tribes without risking jobs in Oxford and Penobscot County.

Thank you for your time and I'd be happy to try to answer any questions.