

**Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 733 (2022)**

Gaming – Video Lottery Operation License – Baltimore–Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport

*Before the Ways and Means Committee: February 23, 2022*

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Washington, and Committee Members,

House Bill 733 would allow the Video Lottery Facility Location Commission (the Commission) to award a video lottery operation license for Baltimore–Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport (BWI Marshall) to operate up to 3,000 video lottery terminals (VLTs) within the airport terminals. Additionally, HB 733 disbands the location and proximity restrictions that are in place for video lottery operation licenses throughout the counties and Baltimore City. Allowing video lottery games in publicly accessible places will exacerbate the negative impacts of problem gambling in Maryland.

As gambling has expanded in Maryland with the legalization of sports betting, it has become more ingrained into society, thus increasing the prevalence of problem gambling, gambling disorders, and individuals vulnerable to problem gambling behaviors. By upholding responsible gambling principles, Maryland can better protect citizens from careless gambling practices and see a decrease in problem gambling and gambling disorders.

**Placement of Video Lottery Machines in the Public Terminals at BWI Marshall Airport is Counter to Responsible Gambling Measures for Teens and Young Adults**

Under current Maryland law, a video lottery operation licensee must ensure that individuals under the age of 21 are not allowed to play VLTs and are not allowed in areas of the licensed facility where VLTs are located.<sup>1</sup> This protects minors from being exposed to gambling behavior and from having access to gambling. As written, HB 733 does not specify how VLTs will be integrated into BWI Marshall and fails to address security measures that would keep underage individuals from being exposed or having access, as required by state law. Implementing security measures to protect underage patrons of BWI is extremely important given the alarming underage gambling trends in Maryland. In a 2018 survey, between 17% and 29% of high school students in Maryland reported gambling at least once in the last year. Even more concerning, of those students reporting they had gambled in the last year, between 3.5%

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<sup>1</sup> Md. State Government Code Ann. § 9-1A-24(c)(1).

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UNFAVORABLE ON HB 733

and 7.9% reported gambling frequently - 10 or more times per year.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, we expect the prevalence of gambling by Maryland youth will increase in the coming years. Age and location restrictions are some of the most common and effective public policies to cut against this trend. With no protections for young people, HB 733 would contribute to our youth gambling problem.

### **Vulnerable Individuals Will be Adversely Affected by the Increase in Gambling Machines in Unconventional, Public Spaces**

In addition to protecting individuals under the age of 21, Maryland law also prescribes responsible gambling practices for individuals with gambling disorders. Specifically, state law requires that the Maryland State Lottery and Gaming Control Agency establish a list of individuals who must be excluded or ejected from video lottery establishments, with responsibility on the licensee. Video lottery operation licensees must also exclude or eject individuals in the Voluntary Exclusion Program (VEP).<sup>3</sup> Nothing in the language of HB 733 specifies how this can be accomplished at a public facility like BWI Marshall. The VEP was established so that people who believe they cannot gamble responsibly can take affirmative action to improve their mental health by removing the trigger. Allowing VLTs in BWI Marshall is contrary to public health because these people will now be exposed to their trigger every time they travel; the ambiguity in the bill even leaves open the question of whether a person in the VEP would be allowed on BWI Marshall property.

### **Conclusion**

As Maryland continues to expand its gambling industry, it should do so in a safe and effective manner. Shielding vulnerable individuals from unnecessary exposure to gambling should be a legislative priority in this process. It is imperative that access to gambling be reduced to a minimum when in a public space. One way to shield these individuals is to not allow VLTs in public spaces like BWI Marshall, or at the very least, create a scheme where these vulnerable individuals will not have access or exposure to the VLTs. As it stands, HB 733 does not offer such protections for minors or individuals with gambling disorders. Therefore, I urge the committee to adopt an unfavorable report for House Bill 733.

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<sup>2</sup> Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2018 (accessed at <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/Reports/Documents/2018%20YRBS%20YTS%20Reports/Maryland/2018MDH%20Detail%20Tables.pdf>).

<sup>3</sup> Md. State Government Code Ann. § 9-1A-24(d)(1).