



February 26, 2024

Written testimony from: Kristen Pironis
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To: Senator Guy Guzzone
Chair, Budget & Taxation Committee

Regarding: Unfavorable position on SB565 and SB603

Dear Senator Guzzone:

I'm writing in my role as the destination marketing and management officer for Anne Arundel County. As you may know, Arundel Mills and Live! Casino is Maryland's most visited attraction. That visitation not only brings positive economic impact to the businesses, but to the region through corporate sponsorships, partnerships, and through jobs.

We are at an inflection point for travel, tourism, and hospitality. We came through a very tough time during a near shutdown of the industry during COVID, and have started to see glimmers of what is next. To be clear, we do not want to go back to 2019, but move our organization and our industry forward. Everyone understands how tourism is an engine for economic development, but it is now understood that the experience of travel and hospitality brings joy and well-being to visitors as well as our residents.

In hospitality and tourism—and with partners like Live! Casino—we provide those experiences. Whether it's a dinner out, a night at the hotel, or even some time at the blackjack table, the casino lives up to its promise of an experience for its guests.

The legalization of iGaming in Maryland, scheduled for a vote on February 28, may meet an immediate fiscal need, but threatens our partners, our businesses, and our communities. A vote in support of SB565 and SB603 is a vote against the health of our economy and the health of the people of Maryland. I am writing on behalf of Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel to request that you vote against this potentially devastating legislation. Further, I would welcome the

opportunity to talk through options for moving forward to avoid unintended consequences from this legislation including:

- **Job losses:** There are six brick and mortar casinos in the state which support 27,000 jobs as of 2023, according to the American Gaming Association. iGaming jobs are often held out of state which will cause a decline in locally held jobs and available wages and benefits.
- **Harm to surrounding businesses:** Potential expansion of brick and mortar casinos may halt, which limits possible revenue increases and traffic generation for other nearby businesses which benefit from casino traffic. Surrounding entertainment and shopping clusters, many of which opened because of casino traffic, will lose business as fewer guests travel to brick and mortar locations.
- **Lost opportunities:** Leisure and hospitality are struggling to recover from the pandemic. The loss of casino jobs and vendor opportunities will further harm the success of local businesses.
- **Limited wages:** iGaming could limit job opportunities for Marylanders with only a high school diploma who currently have access to positions like table games dealer which provide living wages and benefits but may disappear if iGaming is legalized.

(source: The Sage Policy Group and Anne Arundel County Chamber of Commerce published a new [report](#) further addressing the potential impacts of iGaming)

To legalize iGaming without sufficient time to research its potential impacts does a disservice to the people and businesses that support and contribute to Maryland's economy. Beyond this potential harm to our state's finances, legalized online gambling will almost certainly result in a rise in gambling addiction, which puts the wellbeing and livelihood of Marylanders at risk.

Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County strongly urges that you oppose this harmful bill. Thank you for your service and your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristen Pironis", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Kristen Pironis
Executive Director