



HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
House Bill 1087
Institutions of Higher Education - Online Gambling - Prohibition
February 22, 2024
Information

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on House Bill 1087. The bill prohibits online gambling on campus and requires that each university erect a “geofence” around the perimeter of the campus that prevents access to online gambling within the campus property.

The University System of Maryland (USM) is comprised of twelve distinguished institutions, and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor’s degrees in the State. Each of USM’s 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country’s largest public online institution.

House Bill 1087 would create a host of unintended consequences in staffing, monitoring and reporting. Practically, internet access within an institution is provided by a combination of institution-controlled networks and cellular carrier networks. The institution has no control over filtering of a cellular carrier's network.

Several institutions are located within census-defined urban tracts. These institutions do not have clear boundaries to easily separate people inside and outside of a geofence. As an example, an institution in downtown Baltimore may have many private residences and businesses interspersed between the institution's buildings. If the institution did establish a geofence and manage to get not only the institution-owned but also the cellular carrier networks to filter online gambling internet traffic, many private citizens and businesses would also have their access to online gambling filtered out.

There are also no clear definitions or lists of online gambling services and sites. Between online poker, online casinos, and all types of betting websites there are literally thousands of online gambling services, apps, and sites across the internet. It would be impossible for an institution to know all the websites and apps that should be blocked under this bill. Even if campuses did know which sites and services to block, they do not have devices on their networks to filter all the possible ways that internet traffic could reach one of these sites. Implementing these filters, if the USM had a list of all the services, and all the traffic ran through all networks, and it wouldn't impact people outside our institutions, would cost several million dollars to implement.

Even if everything else was possible and cost effective, any student that wanted to gamble could go around all campus efforts by using an encrypted network connection (VPN) to tunnel past all our blocks and filters. Encrypted network services are freely available and trivial to setup by individuals with even limited technical knowledge.

The bill also calls for institutions to provide a warning message whenever an individual attempts to participate in an online gambling service. At this writing, USM IT experts are unaware of a technology to “pop up” as messages on people's phones, laptops, and other electronic devices whenever they use an online gambling app or website.

Lastly, content filtering within any institution of higher education could have deleterious impact on many **legitimate** reasons for some network traffic. Researchers study a myriad of topics, some salacious and prurient, as a way to understand better those vices and activities that may be of personal or societal harm. The idea is to find cures and positively change a behavior. One example of research into online gambling is The Maryland Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. By blocking online gambling, this bill would be denying the ability for institutions of higher education to research things such as gambling addiction.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts regarding House Bill 1087.

