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Monday, February 26, 2024

Subject: Testimony in Favor with Amendments for House Bill 1319 - Internet Gaming - Authorization and Implementation

Dear Chairwoman, Atterbeary and distinguished Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

For the record, my name is Antonio Jones, managing partner, Riverboat on the Potomac. I am writing on behalf of our Managing Partners to express our position of “favorable with amendments” on House Bill 1319, which seeks to authorize and implement Internet Gaming in Maryland. As a small, 100% minority-owned business, we recognize the potential benefits that iGaming could bring to our state, both economically and recreationally. However, we believe that certain amendments are necessary to ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion within this emerging industry, particularly for businesses like ours.

Our support for HB 1319 is contingent upon the incorporation of amendments that address the following concerns:

1. **Inclusion of B-2 and Mobile Licensees:** Incorporation of amendments that provide a clearer and direct pathway for B-2 and mobile licensees, including minority and women-owned businesses, to participate in iGaming. This is a crucial step towards reducing disparities between large casinos and smaller entities, ensuring a more equitable landscape within the industry. Specifically, we advocate for amendments that allow B-2 Class and Mobile Classes of Sports Wagering Licensees who are minority or women-owned to be considered for licensing waivers, leveling the playing field, and thus promoting diversity and inclusion.
2. **Licensing Fees and Regulatory Framework:** While inclusivity amendments are a positive development, the high initial licensing fees and the complex regulatory framework pose significant barriers to entry for smaller entities. We urge the committee to consider reviewing and adjusting these fees to ensure they do not disproportionately disadvantage small, minority-owned businesses.

The importance of diversity and inclusion in the gaming industry cannot be overstated. Research, including studies from the University of Nevada, has shown that diverse leadership teams in the Gaming Industry correlate with higher levels of employee engagement and customer satisfaction. This not only improves service quality but also enhances the overall gaming experience for customers.

In conclusion, Riverboat on the Potomac supports HB 1319 with the proposed amendments, believing that such changes will foster a more inclusive, equitable, and diverse iGaming industry in Maryland. We appreciate the committee's consideration of our testimony and look forward to contributing positively to the dialogue surrounding this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Antonio Jones, Managing Partner
Riverboat on-the Potomac, LLC

If you have any questions, please contact:
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