



Worcester County Government

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February 22, 2024

Honorable Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary
6 Bladen Street, Room 131
Annapolis, MD 21401

Honorable Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins
6 Bladen Street, Room 131
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Ways and Means Committee Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members:

The Worcester County Commissioners strongly oppose HB 1319 Internet Gaming – Authorization and Implementation. We are concerned that the introduction of Internet gaming to Maryland would threaten existing brick-and-mortar institutions, fuel gambling addictions, and result in lost revenues to jurisdictions in Worcester County.

Worcester County is home to the Casino at Ocean Downs. Since opening its doors in 2011, the casino has grown to become a vital tourism and economic development partner, generating more than \$46.2 million in local impact grant (LIG) funds to Worcester County, Ocean City, Berlin, and Ocean Pines. These funds are reinvested in our communities. Just a few of the many projects our jurisdictions have been able to fund, even in years of economic downturn, include improvements to roadways and bridges, upgrades to public safety radio systems, additional police vehicles, a new Berlin Police Department, and a new Worcester Technical High School that trains area youth for family-sustaining careers right here at home.

Unlike the Casino at Ocean Downs, which has established partnerships designed to attract residents and visitors to invest their discretionary income in area hotels, eateries, and retail establishments, most online gaming operators are out-of-state. Every dollar spent gambling online would equate to a direct loss to our local economy. And, every dollar spent online would be spent anonymously. We have strong concerns about the emotional, social, and fiscal impacts of online gambling on Worcester County residents. Empirical studies indicate that this immersive platform may increase gambling disorder rates, due to factors such as accessibility, disinhibition, and convenience. To protect the long-term health of residents, businesses, and communities, we respectfully urge you to oppose HB 1319.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony W. Bertino, Jr.", written over a faint circular stamp.

Anthony W. Bertino, Jr.
President

cc: Senator Mary Beth Carozza
Delegate Wayne Hartman
Delegate Charles Otto