



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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SB 884 - Internet Poker Authorization and Regulation Act of 2026 **Senate Budget and Taxation Committee** **March 11, 2026**

OPPOSE

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Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong opposition to SB 884. On behalf of our 700 affiliated unions, I offer the following comments.

Currently, the following unions represent thousands of workers in six Maryland casinos: UNITEHERE, Seafarers International Union (SIU), International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE), United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW), United Auto Workers (UAW), International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the Teamsters (IBT). These workers—table game dealers, slot attendants, bussers, wait staff, bartenders, maintenance, cleaners, and cooks—drive an industry built on in-person hospitality, gaming operations, food service, and security, and are all jobs that cannot be replaced by online platforms.

For the past couple of years, the General Assembly has returned time and time again to examine the idea of introducing IGaming into Maryland. Each time, lawmakers have declined to move forward because the risks are clear. The concerns are the same: the loss of brick-and-mortar jobs, the cannibalization of casino revenue that supports our communities, and the significant public-health consequences of expanding online gambling. Those concerns are still here. SB 884 attempts to rebrand online gaming as “internet poker” and “skills-based gaming,” but the underlying risks are still the same.

It is important to recognize that online poker is very different from live poker. Live poker depends on physical reads, table dynamics, and pace of play. Online poker removes all of these factors. There are no physical reads, no human cues, and no social context to slow the game down. The pace of the game accelerates dramatically online and players can participate in multiple tables simultaneously. The systems are designed to keep players engaged with no natural breaks.

The bill authorizes online poker and a wide range of “skills-based” games, yet the definition of “skills-based” is both broad and ambiguous, giving the Commission the power to approve almost any game it chooses. The Commission is only required to provide notice before adding new games; this is an open invitation to expand into online casino gaming without legislative approval. Legalizing internet poker under this bill would open the door to a less defined online



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gambling market that carries the same risks the General Assembly has already recognized in previous years.

For individuals with addictive tendencies, online poker is especially dangerous. When we spend digitally, we often do not recognize how much we are spending, making it easier to overspend. Online platforms amplify this risk with 24/7 access and an “instant reward” system designed to keep players wagering continuously. This creates a gambling environment that is more dangerous than live poker. Treating online poker as if it is simply a digital version of the live game is grossly misunderstanding the risks.

These problems are not just limited to adults that can legally participate in online gaming but are especially concerning for young people, primarily young men. Today, 90% of bets are placed on phones, meaning gambling is no longer an occasional activity; it is a constant impulse. Young men are 3.4 times more likely to engage in problematic gambling, and the most vulnerable years are ages 16-22, when the brain is still developing impulse control. A 2026 Common Sense Media report found that 36% of adolescent boys ages 11-17 reported gambling in the past year. These children are carrying betting platforms in their pockets 24/7.¹ We cannot risk the long-term negative effects that online gambling has on young people.

SB 884 magnifies the risks that the General Assembly has already recognized in expanding online gambling. The dangers are clear, the harms are documented, and the bill moves Maryland in the wrong direction.

¹ “The Hidden Epidemic: Online Gambling Among Teens and Young Adults.” Prairie Care. February 2026.



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