



Chairwoman Jheanelle Wilkins, Ways & Means Committee
Chairwoman Sandy Bartlett, Judiciary Committee
H-101 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401
Cc: Honorable Members, House of Delegates

Judiciary Committee and
Ways and Means Committee Hearing

March 3, 2026

Dear Chairwoman Wilkins, Chairwoman Bartlett, and Honorable Members -

Testimony in favor of the Maryland Illegal Online Gambling Enforcement Act

I appreciate this opportunity for the Campaign for Fairer Gambling to lend our support of HB 1226. My name is Brianne Doura-Schawohl and I am an international problem gambling expert and director of the Campaign for Fairer Gambling. The Campaign aims to advance a politically bipartisan and scientifically evidence-based practice to enhance consumer protections across the gambling sector. We strive to raise awareness of gambling related harm ultimately doing all that we can to prevent and reduce it.

The campaign fully supports HB 1226, a measure that will take tangible action against the unregulated and illegal gambling markets by clearly codifying the definition of illegal gambling. You will hear quite a bit about the illegal and unregulated gambling market this legislative session, but to date, this is the only piece of legislation that is actually going to do something to limit operations of these sites within the state.

These unregulated sites lack oversight, leaving customers with nowhere to turn if something goes wrong. Operators are also not held to any sort of responsible gambling standard, so these products, which researchers say are ten times more addictive than other forms of gambling, are marketed and peddled completely unchecked.

By passing HB 1226, Maryland would join a list of five states that have already prohibited unregulated sweepstakes gambling, including New York and California. There are also eleven additional states considering similar legislation in 2026.

Maryland Lottery and Gaming Control Agency Director John Martin has already appeared before you to explain why an explicit law such as this one is the single best weapons for a gambling regulator to have in order to work collaboratively and effectively with law enforcement to push these unregulated and unsafe sites out of the market.

A 2024 report from monitoring platform YieldSec determined that illegal operators controlled 74% of the US online gambling marketplace, with nearly 10 unregulated sites running for every regulated site in operation. Each year, those numbers continue to grow. More should and must be done to protect Marylanders.

The latest iGaming report from Penn State University found that, even though online casinos have been legal in Pennsylvania since 2019, the number of Pennsylvanians playing on unregulated sites is on the rise. In just a year, the rate of black-market play jumped from 6% to 10%.

If you really want to do something to address the number of Maryland residents gambling online, HB 1226 is precisely the way to do it. The answer is not to create a regulated counterpart; the answer is to give law enforcement the tools necessary to take action and shut these operations down. Stomping out illegal operators protects the people and communities of Maryland.

We appreciate your consideration and I'd be happy to answer all questions that you may have.

Warmest Regards,

Brianne Doura-Schawohl