



November 20, 2025

Representative Carole Fiola, Chair, Joint Committee Economic Development & Emerging Technologies

Senator Barry Finegold, Chair, Joint Committee Economic Development & Emerging Technologies

Massachusetts State House

24 Beacon Street, Room 236

Boston, MA 02133

Email to halle.mahoney@mahouse.gov

- **Testimony to OPPOSE H.4431, *An Act relative to internet gaming***

Dear Chair Fiola, Chair Decker, and Members Joint Committee Economic Development & Emerging Technologies,

Please accept this testimony as our **strong opposition** to *H.4431, An Act relative to internet gaming (iGaming)*.

We write to you on behalf of the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts ([PHIWM](#)), a Springfield-based non-profit that convenes multi-sector coalitions and conducts research, evaluations, and community health needs assessments. The core of our work is to change poor health outcomes in our rural, suburban and urban communities by advancing health equity and racial justice. We **OPPOSE** legalization of iGaming because it would harm a great number of Baystaters, especially our youth.

Since 2015, we have been collecting youth health self-reported behavior in 8th, 10th and 12th graders through the Springfield Youth Health Survey Initiative, which asks a wide variety of questions on topics from sleeping habits, to substance use, nutrition and physical activity to social media use and bullying.

In 2019, with financial support from the MA Gaming Commission, we began collecting self-reported gambling information to understand changes in gambling behavior with the presence of the MGM casino. We now have several years to compare and have included more districts from Hampden County.

The most recent data from Springfield indicates **an increase** over time in youth reporting gambling. **58% of 8th grade students who participated in the survey reported gambling in**

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2024.¹ That included everything from playing bingo to games of skill.

One of the most prevalent types of gambling reported by the 8th grade survey participants was **sports gambling**, which MA legalized for adults in 2023. In 2024, **almost 30%** of the 8th graders surveyed reported that they had participated in **sports gambling** in the past year.² That's an increase since 2019.

It's gotten easier for adults to gamble in MA in the past few years, especially now with sports gambling. So now it's easier for underage youth as well. And the thing is, increasing access to gambling--and normalizing gambling--is associated with increased risk of problem gambling for youth.³ In 2024, approximately 10% of the 8th graders we surveyed screened positive for problematic gambling.⁴

Gambling at a young age is a risk factor for problematic gambling later in life.⁵ The rise in self-reported gambling behavior over time among the students surveyed has coincided with more legal types of gambling and marketing in the Commonwealth. While there are restrictions on marketing to youth and vulnerable populations by the MA Gaming Commission, it is definitely being advertised to tweens and teens.

Gambling is increasingly harming adults in Massachusetts. More than a quarter of frequent adult gamblers have reported *problem gambling*. In 2022 that number used to be about 20.9%, but now it's 28.0%.⁶

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¹ Szegda, Kathleen (PhD). (May 22, 2025) [Springfield Youth Health Surveys/Understanding Youth Gambling Behavior in Springfield](#). Public Health Institute of Western MA.

² Ibid.

³ N.A. Dowling, S.S. Merkouris, C.J. Greenwood, E. Oldenhof, J.W. Toumbourou, G.J. Youssef, Early risk and protective factors for problem gambling: A systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal studies, *Clinical Psychology Review*, Volume 51, 2017, Pages 109-124.

⁴ Szegda, Kathleen (PhD). (May 22, 2025) [Springfield Youth Health Surveys/Understanding Youth Gambling Behavior in Springfield](#). Public Health Institute of Western MA.

⁵ N.A. Dowling, S.S. Merkouris, C.J. Greenwood, E. Oldenhof, J.W. Toumbourou, G.J. Youssef, Early risk and protective factors for problem gambling: A systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal studies, *Clinical Psychology Review*, Volume 51, 2017, Pages 109-124.

⁶ Volberg, Rachel (PhD). (July 31, 2025). *Current Trends in Gambling, Sports Betting and Problem Gambling in Massachusetts, 2022-2024*.



Problem gambling is an important public health issue. Individuals experiencing problem gambling are 15x⁷ more likely to die by suicide than members of the general population. A January 2025 report⁸ from the Center for Data Analytics and Sports Gaming Research identified that: *“Problem gambling hotline calls have surged everywhere that iGaming has been introduced with studies in the U.S. and around the world have shown minorities are disproportionately affected by gambling-related harms.”*

Given all this, we at the Public Health Institute urge you to oppose H.4431. The Commonwealth needs to know a great deal more about how to mitigate the problems created by easier and easier access to gambling and how to ensure that these harmful products will not be advertised nor accessible to youth.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to improving the health of all Massachusetts residents.

Sincerely,

Jessica Collins
Executive Director

⁷ Marionneau V, Nikkinen J. Gambling-related suicides and suicidality: A systematic review of qualitative evidence. *Front Psychiatry*. 2022 Oct 26;13:980303. doi: 10.3389/fpsy.2022.980303. PMID: 36387006; PMCID: PMC9645554.

⁸ [The Impact of iGaming on African American Communities: A Public Health, Mental Health, Social, and Economic Assessment](#); Center for Data Analytics and Sports Gaming Research; January 2025.