An antigambling group that has fought for the right to vote on a casino repeal measure is now retooling for the next step: persuading people to vote yes.

Repeal the Casino Deal has hired two experienced political operatives to key campaign posts, revamped its website for a fall referendum, and is uniting individual casino-opposition groups across Massachusetts into a statewide organization.

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What the group does not yet know is whether there will be a vote. Both sides of the gambling debate are keeping close watch on the Supreme Judicial Court, which is expected to rule by early July whether a casino repeal measure may move ahead to the November ballot. Repeal activists say they cannot afford to wait to get organized. “What a shame, if and when we get on the ballot, if we’re not in the process of mobilizing our increasing grass-roots momentum,” said former Massachusetts attorney general Scott Harshbarger, an adviser to the repeal group. Casino opponents have been working to place a repeal measure on the statewide ballot since lawmakers legalized Las Vegas-style casino gambling in Massachusetts nearly three years ago. Attorney General Martha Coakley ruled last year that the repeal measure was an unconstitutional taking of the implied contract rights of casino applicants and therefore could not be on the ballot. Opponents appealed to the SJC; the court heard arguments on the case in May. Continue reading below Salem political strategist Darek Barcikowski, 36, will direct the repeal campaign if there is one, the repeal group confirmed Wednesday. Barcikowski managed the 2012 election of state Senator Joan Lovely, a Salem Democrat, and became manager for the 2013 Boston mayoral campaign of Bill Walczak, who was known for his opposition to casino gambling. Barcikowski has also worked on campaigns for US Representative Stephen F. Lynch and US Senator Edward Markey, he said. The repeal group also hired consultant Kristin MacEachern to be the campaign’s fund-raiser. She has 20 years of experience as a finance director and consultant, the group said. The new staff members join David Guarino of Melwood Global, a political consultant and former Boston Herald reporter who has been advising the group. The group intends to draw supporters, money, and campaign volunteers from the many anticasino groups that have cropped up around the state in the past two years in nearly every community in which a casino was proposed. Local groups already on board the statewide repeal campaign include Quaboag Valley Against Casinos, No Casino Springfield, No Slots Leominster, No Casino West Springfield, No Slots Millbury, Casino-Free Milford, and the East Boston group No Eastie Casino. Casino supporters, including at least some of the companies pitching projects in Massachusetts, have promised to defend the casino law in a political campaign, if necessary. “There are a lot of jobs at stake here,” said Dale Bergvine, a Plainville resident and member of People for Plainville, which favors casinos. He said the group “absolutely” would work against the repeal referendum if necessary. “Hopefully it doesn’t get on the ballot, but if it does, I’m sure

it will be overwhelmingly defeated," he said. About 76 percent of Plainville voters supported the Penn National plan in a local referendum last September. But casino opponents in West Springfield, Milford, Palmer, and East Boston defeated casino proposals at the ballot box. Opponents in other towns blocked gambling proposals before they could make it to a municipal vote. Many of the activists who led the local anticasino campaigns are now collecting signatures for Repeal the Casino Deal. The group must submit 11,485 valid signatures by June 18 to remain eligible for a spot on the November ballot. Barcikowski said the group wants to collect at least 25,000 signatures to ensure it will have enough valid ones. He said he is confident they will have enough signatures. "One of the things we looked at is how we can use the signature drive to build for a full-blown campaign, and that is precisely what we're doing," he said. "The grass-roots organizations driving and accelerating the signature drive allow us to reinvigorate the base, to reach out to folks, and to build an organization across the state." The 2011 casino law authorized three resort-style casinos, no more than one in each of three regions of the state, and one slot machine parlor. In February, the state gambling commission awarded the slot parlor license to the Penn proposal in Plainville. The commission is expected next week to complete its review of the only viable project vying for the Western Massachusetts resort license, an MGM proposal in Springfield. The regulators hope to choose later this summer between two companies competing for the Greater Boston license. The final license, for Southeastern Massachusetts, is scheduled to be issued in 2015.

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