

Casino executives argue sports betting elsewhere is pulling workers out of Massachusetts

Written by Administrator
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Gaming industry executives from Plainridge Park Casino, MGM Springfield and Encore Boston Harbor on Monday reminded lawmakers of the "hyper-competitive industry" they operate in and of the ways the state's prohibition on sports betting is affecting their businesses as the time for legislative negotiators to strike a deal runs short.

The three gambling centers that have opened under the state's 2011 expanded gaming law told House and Senate members in [a letter](#) that they have collectively invested more than \$4 billion in infrastructure, created more than 12,000 construction jobs, employ about 5,000 Massachusetts residents and have generated more than \$1 billion in state tax revenue. But, they said in the letter, the availability of legal sports betting in 35 states — including neighboring New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut and New York — now means that "no resident of the Commonwealth is more than an hour's drive from a state where legal sports betting is available."

"As a result, our competitors in these states are now offering a significant amenity and service we are prohibited from offering in Massachusetts and capturing the Commonwealth's entertainment dollars once again," Encore Boston President Jenny Holaday, MGM Springfield President Chris Kelley and Plainridge Park Vice President and General Manager North Grounsell wrote in a letter that does not press for any specific policy provisions but simply urges lawmakers to legalize sports betting.

The Gaming Commission has kept track of how the workforce at the casinos and slots parlor have bounced back after the pandemic closed all three facilities for about three months, and the operators told lawmakers that not having sports betting "is impacting our ability to build our workforce as employees, despite increased wages, sign-on bonuses and incentives, particularly those working in tipped positions, are choosing to work in venues that draw significantly larger crowds because of sports betting."

Six lawmakers have been talking since early June to try to find a compromise between the sports betting bill the House passed 156-3 and the version that the Senate passed without any recorded opposition. Senate President Karen Spilka told reporters Monday that she "hope[s] we do get something done."

Asked whether authorization for betting on college games would be in a final bill — it was not

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authorized in the Senate's bill and House Speaker Ron Mariano last year said not having collegiate betting "probably would be" a dealbreaker for him — Spilka said the issue was "up for negotiation."

"I really hope that it's not — the approach is not — an all or nothing bill," she said.

Spilka opposed the state's expansion into casino gaming, before playing a lead role in crafting the 2011 expanding gaming law.

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