

Update on the Expanded Gambling Bill: Please Contact the Conference Committee

Senator Karen E. Spilka

2nd Middlesex & Norfolk

On Thursday, July 1, after eight days of vigorous Senate debate, I voted in favor of the Senate's proposal on expanded gambling in Massachusetts. While my focus continues to be on the economic development potential of my district, including in the areas of biotechnology, clean energy, information technology and the creative economy, among others, we must consider what this new industry means for all of Massachusetts.

This bill would, create 15,000 full-time permanent jobs and up to 9,000 immediate construction jobs and infuse \$350 million in new revenue to the state annually. When our residents throughout the state are hurting for work, and programs on which our neighbors depend are facing budget cuts, we can't afford to ignore these numbers.

I am also fully aware, however, that many of my constituents have concerns about this industry and the potential of a casino in MetroWest. Let me assure you that I share those concerns and have worked hard to see them addressed in the Senate proposal.

With Governor Patrick, Speaker of the House DeLeo and Senate President Murray all in favor of expanded gambling, support for casino gambling is growing and the legalization of casinos is very likely this legislative session. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to utilize my expertise as Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Economic Development and Emerging Technologies to help craft a Senate plan for casino development that is best for the Commonwealth. In doing so, the Senate crafted a plan that I believe is also good for the MetroWest.

To make certain that the economic development impact of casinos is truly distributed statewide, I successfully advocated for two geographic provisions in the Senate bill. The first involves dividing the state into three distinct regions, with only one resort casino license available to each region. By working with my Senate colleagues, Region 1 comprises Boston west to include Worcester County, ensuring that a "western" casino would, in fact, be located well beyond 495 in one of the four western counties, Hampden, Hampshire, Berkshire or Franklin, that make up Region 3: The second critical geographic provision prevents two casinos from being sited within 40 miles of each other, thereby spreading the opportunities for economic development and job creation and creating robust, competitive markets through the entire state.

Together, these provisions help to achieve the Senate bill's goal of ***strategically and appropriately*** sited resort casinos which will maximize both job creation and revenues for the state. Because of the Senate language, any MetroWest application would be competing with other Region 1 applications, including Boston, which is an appropriate and extremely competitive site based on the requirements put forth in the bill. Additionally, in the event of the development of a casino in either Boston or Fall River—another competitive location that,

like Boston, currently enjoys strong support for casinos—the MetroWest would likely be too close to be considered to ensure a robust, competitive market.

The Senate bill also includes strong stipulations for casino-funded community mitigation, requiring local advisory councils and memoranda of understanding with surrounding communities, which compel the negotiation of upfront impact fees to those surrounding communities. I also voted in favor of an amendment that would have allowed towns within a 15-mile radius to vote on a casino proposal; unfortunately, despite some support, it did not have sufficient votes to pass.

Further, the Senate version of the bill takes an aggressive approach to problem-gambling. It includes an amendment I successfully advocated for that requires a baseline study for the treatment of addiction before casinos even enter the state, as well as ongoing research on the impact of casinos on both individuals and the Commonwealth.

Overall, the Senate bill contains stronger protections for individuals and communities, and for the MetroWest in particular, than the House bill did. It is extremely important that the two geographic provisions which establish appropriate distances between resort casinos are maintained in the final bill.

I encourage anyone with concerns about a MetroWest casino to join me in contacting the members of the conference committee in voicing your strong support for these provisions. Contact information is included below:

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Should you continue to have questions about the expanded gambling bill, please don't hesitate to contact my office at (617) 722-1640.