

Presentation of Evidence for Massachusetts Gaming Commission

# Impacts of casino gambling on public safety

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**greo**

# Evidence Synthesis Purpose and Approach

# Evidence on the impacts of casino gambling on public safety

- The Massachusetts Gaming Commission requested an evidence summary on the impacts of casino gambling on public safety.
- The information will serve as source material for MGC's website, funding materials, presentations, and stakeholder communications.

# Guiding questions

1. What is the nature of the relationship between casino gambling and public safety in Massachusetts?
2. What is the nature of the relationship between casino gambling and public safety more broadly?
3. How might community-based stakeholders mitigate the harms associated with casino-based gambling and public safety?

# Search parameters

Greo identified, reviewed, and synthesized evidence that is:

- Useful in the Massachusetts context (i.e., evidence generated in Massachusetts or a comparable jurisdiction);
- Found in academic and grey literature; and
- Recently published (in the past 5 years).

# Disclaimer

Crime analysis consultant and the author of public safety reports for MGC, Christopher Bruce, cautions in his reports:

**“Until analyzed, statistics that indicate notable increases or decreases in activity are simply indicators worthy of further analysis, and not proof of any particular “cause” of the changes.”<sup>1</sup>**

What is the nature of the relationship between casino gambling and public safety in Massachusetts?

# Scope and focus

- 1.1 Overall impact on public safety
- 1.2 Increases in public safety issues
- 1.3 Impact of COVID-19



# 1.1 Overall impact on public safety

## Plainridge Park Casino

- Had little impact on most crimes, public safety concerns, and calls to the police in its first two years in operation (July 2015 to June 2017).<sup>2</sup>
- Increases were comparable to—and in some cases lower than—increases for similar types of destinations in other towns.<sup>3</sup> In the region, *not accounting for any surrounding community impact*, in its first and second years of operation, it is estimated that Plainridge Park casino accounted for:
  - 12 to 14% more total crimes (52 total first year; over 80 second year)<sup>2,3</sup>
  - 10% more property crimes (22 total first year; 41 second year), for example, auto theft, burglary, credit card fraud, etc.<sup>2,3</sup>
  - 3% more calls for police service (288 total first year; 436 second year)<sup>2,3</sup>

# 1.1 Overall impact on public safety

## **MGM Springfield Casino**

- Most of the associated crime occurred at the casino itself during its first 18 months of operation (August 2018 to February 2020).<sup>4</sup>
- There were no confirmed cases of people who indicated that they were motivated to commit a crime due to gambling (e.g., to support problem gambling).<sup>1, 5</sup>

# 1.1 Overall impact on public safety

## **MGM Springfield Casino (*continued*)**

- In its first four months of operation, MGM Springfield casino had the highest number of crimes and calls to police/security in the region, attributed to the large number of people who were drawn to the location (more than 1.5 million visitors). However, *not accounting for any surrounding community impact*, the casino only raised the region's public safety statistics by a small degree. The casino contributed:<sup>5</sup>
  - 1.9% to the city's violent crime total
  - 1.1% to its property crime total
  - 1.9% to its total crime
  - 1.1% to its calls for service
- After 18 months, MGM Springfield casino still only accounted for about a 1% increase in Springfield's crime.<sup>1</sup>

# 1.1 Overall impact on public safety

## Encore Boston Harbour Casino

- Had few direct links with public safety issues during its first year and four months of operation (July 2019 to October 2020). Overall, the region and most cities had expected levels of crime.<sup>7,8</sup>
- In its first six months of operation, there were increases in crime and calls for service that were not unexpected given the number of people who were drawn to the casino (more than 3.5 million visitors during the first eight months). In Everett, *not accounting for any surrounding community impact*, this resulted in a:<sup>6,7</sup>
  - 9.5% increase in violent crime
  - 5.1% increase in property crime
  - 6% increase in total crime
  - 4.1% increase in calls for service

# 1.1 Overall impact on public safety

## Public safety issues within the casinos

- In its first and second years of operation, Plainridge Park casino itself accounted for 2,906 “incidents” at the casino, 504 of which were actual crimes. Trends included theft of gaming credits, drug use/distribution, angry/intoxicated people, and theft of personal property.<sup>2</sup>
- In its first four months of operation, MGM Springfield casino itself accounted for 1,751 calls for service at the casino and 903 responses from the police, which resulted in 118 crimes and 115 arrests. At the end of its first year, total arrests at the casino rose to 208.<sup>4,5</sup>
- In its first six months of operation, Encore Boston Harbor casino itself accounted for 124 arrests, including 22 violent crimes and 20 property crimes.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.2 Increases in public safety issues

Increases occurred in some public safety issues across the wider region surrounding the casinos in the early months and years they were open. It is unclear if these increases are directly linked to the presence of casinos, unless otherwise indicated.

- Drunk driving
- Vehicles and traffic
- Property crime
- Domestic violence
- Sexual assault
- Shoplifting, purse snatching, and other crimes in commercial establishments
- Credit card fraud
- Money laundering
- Prostitution
- Local emergency services
- Other

## 1.2 Increases in public safety issues

### **Drunk driving**

- The three casinos may be the origin of tens of thousands of drunk driving trips each year. This estimation is supported by “last drink” locations indicated in police reports of people stopped for drunk driving.<sup>8</sup>
  - It is likely that these drunk driving trips result in at least 35 additional vehicle collisions a year in Massachusetts.
- Drunk driving in communities surrounding MGM Springfield casino, including in Agawam and Chicopee, were influenced by the casino in its first 18 months of operation. In contrast, cases of drunk driving went down slightly across the larger region.<sup>1, 4, 5</sup>

## 1.2 Increases in public safety issues

### **Drunk driving (*continued*)**

- Drunk driving arrests in Everett were higher a year and four months after the Encore Boston Harbor casino opened compared to before the casino opened. The rest of the region had numbers of drunk driving arrests that were in expected ranges based on averages from prior to the casino's opening.<sup>7</sup>
  - This increase in drunk driving arrests may indicate that there was more police enforcement in Everett, rather than that there was an increase in drunk driving.
  - Despite this increase in drunk driving arrests, there was no indication that there was an increase in vehicle collisions on local roads due to the casino.



## 1.2 Increases in public safety issues

### **Vehicles and traffic**

- Vehicle collisions, likely due to the general increase in traffic in the area around Plainridge Park casino in its first two years of operation, occurred mostly during standard work and early evening hours. However, vehicle collisions were already higher than average when Plainridge Park casino opened.<sup>2</sup>
- Disabled vehicles, complaints of improper or erratic driving, and suspicious activity related to traffic in Plainville, especially on Route 1, increased in the casino's first year of operation.<sup>3,9</sup>

## 1.2 Increases in public safety issues

### **Vehicles and traffic (*continued*)**

- Vehicle collisions, traffic complaints from some communities on state roads (most likely influenced by the casino), and disabled vehicles, especially in the more southern communities surrounding MGM Springfield casino increased in its first 18 months of operation.<sup>1, 4, 5</sup>
- Thefts from vehicles and nighttime thefts in residential areas of some communities surrounding MGM Springfield casino increased in its first four months of operation.<sup>5</sup>
- Vehicle collisions on some roads that lead to MGM Springfield casino increased in its first four months of operation. However, this increase was lower than expected and only affected some communities.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2 Increases in public safety issues

### **Property crime**

- Several patterns of property crime increased in nearby communities surrounding MGM Springfield casino in its first four months of operation.<sup>5</sup>
- Thefts from vehicles and buildings in the region around Encore Boston Harbor casino increased in its first year of operation.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2 Increases in public safety issues

### **Domestic violence**

- Domestic violence increased, which made up 44% (year 1) and 49% (year 2) of the total assaults that police recorded in the region. This is compared to 35%–40% of total assaults before the Plainridge Park casino opened. The increase began the year before the casino's opening.<sup>2</sup>
- Domestic violence in Ludlow, Wilbraham, and the larger area surrounding MGM Springfield casino increased after its first four months of operation.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2 Increases in public safety issues

### **Sexual assault**

- Sexual assaults increased in Springfield, with several assaults on the streets that surround the MGM Springfield casino after the first four months of operation.<sup>5</sup>
- Sexual assaults and statutory rape increased in Everett in the first year of the Encore Boston Harbor casino's operation.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2 Increases in public safety issues

### **Shoplifting, purse snatchings, and other crimes in commercial establishments**

- Crimes at places such as hotels, convenience stores, and gas stations in the areas surrounding Plainridge Park casino increased in its first two years of operation.<sup>2</sup>
- Shoplifting and other crimes on the same block as the MGM Springfield casino increased in its first 18 months of operation, most likely influenced by the casino.<sup>1, 4, 5</sup>
- Patterns of purse snatching increased in Springfield and Holyoke.<sup>1</sup>
- Calls to police regarding Union Station in Springfield increased, likely influenced by the casino.<sup>1, 4, 5</sup>

## 1.2 Increases in public safety issues

### **Credit card fraud**

- Credit card fraud increased in multiple communities surrounding Plainridge Park casino during the first year of the casino's operation, with a decrease in number of cases the second year.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2 Increases in public safety issues

### **Money laundering**

- At least four reports of incidents related to money-laundering were reported at Plainridge Park casino. They involved sightings of people who fed a large number of small bills into machines and then cashed the TITO tickets out for larger-denomination bills.<sup>2</sup>



## 1.2 Increases in public safety issues

### **Prostitution**

- There was an increase in prostitution in Lynn, a community surrounding Encore Boston Harbor casino in its first year of operation, but it may be a result of more enforcement.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2 Increases in public safety issues

### **Local emergency services**

- A certain amount of crime was reported within Encore casino walls, creating new challenges for the responding law enforcement agencies.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2 Increases in public safety issues

### Other

- Reports of 'lost property' and 'suspicious activity' in Plainville increased in the casino's first two years of operation.<sup>2</sup>
- Bad and forged checks increased in Northampton and Agawam, communities surrounding MGM Springfield casino in its first two years of operation.<sup>5</sup>
- Fraud in Springfield that police considered 'extortion' (i.e., obtaining something, especially money, using threats or force) increased in the casino's first two years of operation.<sup>5</sup>
- Murder, aggravated assault, fraud, bad checks, and disorderly conduct increased in Everett in the casino's first year of operation.<sup>7</sup>
- Liquor law violations in the communities surrounding Encore Boston Harbor casino increased in its first year of operation.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.3 Impact of COVID-19

- Closure of the Encore Boston Harbor casino due to the COVID-19 pandemic (from the middle of March to early July 2020, and operating at 25% capacity afterwards) resulted in very low levels of crime and vehicle collisions around the casino and in the region overall.<sup>7</sup>
  - In the region, COVID-19 closures resulted in declines in theft from people, shoplifting, robberies, and burglaries.<sup>10</sup>
- There was a significant increase in crime before the Encore Boston Harbor Casino reopened. This indicates that factors other than the casino caused crime to rise.<sup>10</sup>
- After the casino re-opened, some types of crime increased but most stayed at low levels. Among those that increased were domestic violence and stolen vehicles, theft from vehicles, and stolen vehicle parts. Vehicle crimes spiked when the casino initially opened and generally stayed high.<sup>7</sup>

What is the nature of the relationship between casino gambling and public safety across other jurisdictions?

# Scope and focus

2.1 Casinos and crime

2.2 Most common types of casino-associated issues

2.3 Characteristics of people who are associated with casino public safety issues

## 2.1 Casinos and crime

- Casinos may be thought to be “hot spot” areas for criminal activity and attract people looking for opportunities to commit crimes due to the high numbers of people.<sup>11, 12</sup> However, it is often the case that, because casinos are seen as significant entertainment and tourist attractions, there is more protection through on-site security and public law enforcement.
- Most research does not find a strong impact of casinos on crime. The impact of casinos on the rates of crime is often lowered once the number of people at the casino is taken into account in the calculation of rates.<sup>13, 14</sup> [Las Vegas; U.S. overall]
  - In addition, people who visit casinos are often older and therefore less likely to commit street crime, which is usually committed by people under 24 years old.<sup>15</sup> [a 2019 review of international research]

## 2.1 Casinos and crime

- Studies that examine the impact of gambling venues on crime in host communities show conflicting findings:<sup>13, 16</sup> [Las Vegas; U.S. overall]
  - Casinos have been linked to increased crime rates.<sup>17, 18</sup> [Chicago; U.S. overall]
  - Other studies have found little to no change in local crime when casinos are present.<sup>19, 20</sup> [Alberta, Canada; Western Massachusetts]
  - Casinos in the U.S. are associated with increases in crime, but crime seems to return to normal rates in 2 (for 'Indian casinos') to 6 years (for other casinos).<sup>21</sup> [U.S. overall]
  - In the U.S. 'Indian casinos' have been linked to long-term reductions in crime in the surrounding area.<sup>21</sup> [U.S. overall]
- High rates of committing an offence related to gambling have been reported among people in prison, as well as by people in treatment for problem gambling.<sup>22</sup> [a 2019 review of international research]



## 2.2 Most common types of casino associated issues

- Types of public safety issues and rates of gambling-related crime are difficult to determine. Organizations may define crimes differently and measure rates of crime among different groups of people. In addition, many offences are not considered illegal or may go undetected if people do not report them (e.g., if among family or coworkers).<sup>22</sup> [a 2019 review of international research]
- One study found that casinos significantly impact the risk of a fatal accident involving drunk driving.<sup>23</sup> [U.S. overall]
  - Rural or medium-sized counties may expect an increase in fatal traffic accidents involving drunk driving when casinos are present, possibly due to driving further while intoxicated. Counties with more urban or larger-than-average populations could expect a decrease in alcohol-related fatal traffic accidents.
- Gambling-related crimes are typically non-violent crimes to recover the money lost to gambling, such as fraud, theft, embezzlement, break & enter, larceny, and selling drugs.<sup>22</sup> [a 2019 review of international research]

## 2.3 Characteristics of people who are associated with casino public safety issues

- There is a strong link between experiencing disordered gambling and crime involvement.<sup>24</sup> [U.K.]
- People who are more likely to be involved with gambling and committing crimes often:
  - Have experienced problem or pathological gambling in the past year<sup>25</sup> [Finland]
  - Feel that their problem gambling has been life-long<sup>25</sup> [Finland]
  - Have a mental illness or are prone to impulsivity and higher levels of anxiety<sup>24, 26, 27</sup> [U.K.; Canada; international; Hartford, Connecticut]
  - Have a lower education level, a low income, are unemployed, or receive social assistance<sup>24, 25</sup> [U.K.; Finland]
  - Experienced inadequate supervision from parents, or other negative experiences, as a child<sup>24, 27</sup> [U.K.; Canada; international; Hartford, Connecticut]
  - Have friends and family who believe gambling and committing crime is acceptable or have a family member who has been arrested<sup>27</sup> [Canada; international; Hartford, Connecticut]

How might community-based stakeholders mitigate the harms associated with casino-based gambling and public safety?

# Scope and focus

3.1 Understanding and awareness training

3.2 Screening and support

3.3 Policy

3.4 Future research

## 3.1 Understanding awareness and training

- **Improve understanding in the criminal justice system** of the varying degrees of gambling harm and create opportunities to support people, such as de-escalating situations with the police.<sup>28</sup>
- Contribute to **raising awareness in the community** at large about gambling-related harm and crime so that it can be addressed using a public health approach, outside of the criminal justice system.<sup>28</sup>
- Provide **training for police forces and other criminal justice agencies** about the nature of gambling-related harms and the links with crime, to be able to better understand and identify gambling-related harm, crime, and problem gambling.<sup>27, 28</sup>

## 3.2 Screening and support

- Determine the most effective way to **screen for gambling-related harm**, and in what settings, and include screening in strategic plans for the police, probation services, prisons, etc.<sup>26-30</sup>
- Develop and promote **options for support and treatment** from problem gambling in all parts of the state, including as part of programs for other types of risky behaviours, such as substance use.<sup>27, 28</sup>
- Identify groups of people who are more likely to commit gambling-related crimes and **create programs to support these groups** and prevent such crimes (e.g., partnering with credit counselling services).<sup>27, 31</sup>

## 3.3 Policy

- Channel resources towards areas that have **multi-cultural neighborhoods and areas where people have lower levels of education**, factors that could make people more susceptible to committing casino-related crime.<sup>32</sup>
- Identify the appropriate **agencies for resources** (e.g., police forces, crime agencies, treatment organizations) when there are increases in specific gambling-related crimes.<sup>31</sup>
- Integrate people with **lived experience of public safety issues related to casinos** in decision making about policy and practice.<sup>26</sup>

## 3.4 Future research

- Further research is needed to address public safety issues connected with casinos, on topics such as **theft from vehicles, identity theft** (from stealing identification documents from vehicles), **human trafficking, and drunk driving**.<sup>10</sup>
- Sources of information need to be identified and combined to track **human trafficking** connected with Massachusetts casinos. Most information on public safety in MGC-commissioned reports was drawn from police statistics, which are poor at measuring crimes such as human trafficking, which are more hidden.<sup>6</sup>
- Future research will need to contend with the challenges of changes to levels of crime as a result of the **COVID-19 crisis** in its analyses.<sup>7</sup>



# For more information



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# *Thank You*

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