

Bay Staters strongly favor resort casinos

Residents believe resort casinos a fiscal and economic benefit

Majority support across political and ideological spectrums

Massachusetts residents reject three-of-five anti-casino arguments

Bay Staters support the authorization of two or more resort casinos in the Commonwealth by a 57-31% margin, according to a public opinion survey released today by the Center for Policy Analysis (CFPA) at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. A random sample of 1,256 Massachusetts residents was asked: "In your opinion, should the state legislature authorize two or more resort casinos in Massachusetts? yes – no – don't know." The survey has a 2.8% margin of error at a 95% confidence interval.

The survey, *Playing the Odds I*, is the first of a three-part public release of findings from the CFPA's 3rd New England Gaming Behavior Survey, which is conducted every two years as part of its New England Gaming Research Project. *Playing the Odds I* focuses on public attitudes toward expanded gaming in Massachusetts, where casino gaming has become a perennial policy debate in the state legislature.

Majorities of nearly every socio-economic group, political party, ideology, and region of the state, expressed support for authorizing two or more resort casinos in the Commonwealth.

Those 18-29 years-of-age support resort casinos by a 59%-31% margin; among those 30-39, 62%-24%; aged 40-49, 63%-28%; 50-59, 53%-37%; 60-69, 57%-35%; and even among those age 70 and over, a plurality voiced support by 45%-40%.

The state's highest income earners expressed the greatest support for authorizing resort casinos in the commonwealth. Those earning less than \$25K support resort casinos by 57%-29%; \$25K-\$44,999, 64%-24%; \$45K-\$74,999, 57%-31%; \$75K-\$149,999, 59%-31%; and for those earning \$150K or more, 65%-30%.

Individuals without a high school diploma support the authorization of resort casinos by a margin of 81%-14%; those with a high school diploma, by 60%-27%; those possessing an associate's degree, by 65%-26%; and those with a bachelor's degree, by 55%-34%. Those possessing a master's or doctoral degree oppose authorizing resort casinos, by a margin of 43%-46%.

Southeastern Massachusetts residents favor resort casinos by a margin of 60%-29%; central Massachusetts residents, by 59%-29%; northeastern Massachusetts residents, by 58%-34%; Greater Boston residents, by 55%-33%; while residents of the Cape & Island were the only region to oppose authorizing resort casinos by a margin of 37%-46%, notwithstanding the fact that 49% of that region's residents indicate they would be somewhat likely or very likely to visit a casino in Southeastern Massachusetts.

Urban area residents support resort casinos by 60%-26%; suburban residents, by 56%-33%; and among those who live in rural areas, by 55%-36%.

Even across the political and ideological spectrums, resort casinos command majority support.

Democrats and Republicans both favor the authorization of two or more resort casinos by 58%-31%, while unenrolled or independent voters, support authorizing two or more resort casinos by a 57%-32% margin.

Among those identifying themselves as “very liberal,” support for resort casinos was 51-35%; among “liberals,” it was 62%-27%; among those who identified themselves as “moderate,” 57% to 34%; among “conservatives,” 55%-33%; and among those claiming to be “very conservative,” 55%-33%. Men favored resort casinos by more than two-to-one, 67%-26%, while women, by a near majority, 49%-37%, also tend to support the authorization of two or more resort casinos in Massachusetts.

“Whether it is the belief that Massachusetts can no longer afford to export \$1 billion a year in gaming revenues to Connecticut and Rhode Island, rising unemployment and mounting job losses, the threat of increased taxes and user fees during an economic downturn, or a combination of those factors, across the board Bay Staters now believe that state leaders should authorize two or more resort casinos in the Commonwealth,” Barrow said.

The survey also asked Massachusetts residents 10 randomly ordered questions about the potential economic and fiscal benefits of resort casinos (5 questions) and the potential negative economic and social costs of resort casinos (5 questions). Residents were asked: “On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being ‘strongly disagree’ and 5 being ‘strongly agree,’ how strongly do you agree or disagree that a resort casino in Massachusetts would...” On the measures of fiscal and economic benefits, Massachusetts residents are overwhelmingly convinced that resort casinos will generate tax revenues for the state, create new jobs for Massachusetts residents, recapture gambling revenues being lost to other states, increase tourism, and stimulate local economic development.

By a 79%-9% margin, Bay Staters believe resort casinos will generate tax revenues; by 79-10%, they believe resort casinos will create jobs; by 71%-13%, they believe resort casinos will recapture much of the \$1 billion now spent annually by Massachusetts patrons at the Connecticut casinos and Rhode Island slot parlors; by 68%-17%, they believe resort casinos will increase tourism; and by 67%-16%, residents believe resort casinos will stimulate economic development.

Conversely, Bay Staters reject three of the five arguments most often cited by opponents of expanded gaming. When asked about the potential economic and social costs of casino gaming, Bay State residents reject the argument, by 54%-25%, that small local businesses will be hurt by resort casinos. By 50%-31%, they reject the claim that resort casinos will degrade the host community’s quality of life; and by 47%-32%, they do not believe that resort casinos will increase crime.

Of the remaining two arguments cited by opponents, neither claim gained support from a majority of residents. Bay Staters agreed, by a bare plurality of 40%-36%, that gaming expansion will increase political corruption and, by 46%-35%, that gaming expansion will increase problem gambling.

“The dam has broken among Massachusetts residents,” said Dr. Clyde W. Barrow, CFPA director. “Support for resort casinos is deep and wide, and growing majorities of Massachusetts citizens believe the fiscal and economic benefits of resort casinos will far outweigh any real or imagined social costs.”

Last month the CFPA released its fifth annual New England Gaming Update, which estimated Bay Staters in 2008 spent \$920 million at the Connecticut casinos, and Rhode Island and Maine slot parlors. That spending by Bay Staters generated \$211 million in tax payments to the Connecticut, Rhode Island and Maine state treasuries. Overall, since New England’s resort casinos and slot parlors opened their doors, Massachusetts residents have spent more than \$10 billion. And that Bay Stater spending has generated more than \$4 billion in tax payments to the Connecticut, Rhode Island and Maine state treasuries.

When asked how state leaders should spend any new tax revenue generated by resort casinos, 58% of Bay Staters said it should be distributed as additional local aid to the state’s 351 cities and towns, while 30% want gaming tax revenues spent on property tax relief for individual taxpayers.

When asked how likely they were to visit a Massachusetts resort casino located in greater Boston, southeastern Massachusetts or western Massachusetts, Bay Staters expressed an affinity for all three sites with the residents of each region more likely to visit a casino located nearest to them.

A greater Boston resort casino would lure patrons throughout the metropolitan and northeastern regions and recapture a significant amount of the nearly \$1 billion spent in 2008 by Bay Staters at the Connecticut casinos and Rhode Island slot parlors. It would also provide a local alternative for New Hampshire and Maine residents who, last year, spent \$88 million at Foxwoods Resort and Mohegan Sun.

A southeastern Massachusetts resort casino would command strong patronage from residents south of Boston adjacent to the region's major roadways --- Rts. 1, 3, 24, 95 and 128. And a southeastern Massachusetts resort casino would also provide a local alternative to Rhode Island residents who, last year, spent \$537 million at the Connecticut casinos and Rhode island slot parlors.

"Playing the Odds 2" and "Playing the Odds 3" will be released separately within the next two months. The second and third parts of the New England Gaming Behavior Survey will focus on the demographics, gaming behavior, and visitation patterns of New England's casino gamblers, as well as the prevalence of problem gambling in New England.

The New England Gaming Research Project is funded entirely by the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. The survey was conducted from December 20, 2008 and March 13, 2009 using a survey instrument developed by the Center for Policy Analysis.

"Playing the Odds 1" is available at: www.umassd.edu/cfpa, on Monday, April 6, 2009, at 1:00am.