

Study updates impacts of Plainridge Park Casino

Written by Administrator
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Rachel Volberg, UMass Amherst research professor in the School of Public Health and Health Sciences, is leading the most comprehensive investigation ever undertaken into the impact of introducing casino gambling. Credit: UMass Amherst

The Plainridge Park Casino has created job opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed, among other economic benefits, without an increase in problem gambling, according to University of Massachusetts Amherst researchers from the Social and Economic Impacts of Gambling in Massachusetts (SEIGMA) study.

Three new reports, which are part of the most in-depth and comprehensive investigation ever undertaken into the impact of introducing [casino](#) gambling, were presented Thursday to the Massachusetts Gaming Commission in Plainville. The first report on the [social and economic impacts from 2013 to 2018](#) found largely [positive effects](#) from the state's only slot parlor. The SEIGMA team summarized some of the findings in two [fact sheets](#) on traffic and public health impacts.

No change in the rate of [problem gambling](#) was detected, likely due to a pre-existing high rate of gambling by Plainville-area residents at nearby casinos in Rhode Island and Connecticut, in operation since the early 1990s.

Researchers also discussed results from [a survey of the slot parlor's new employees](#) in 2017-2018 and released an [economic impact report](#) covering the slot parlor's first four years of operation.

With two larger, resort casinos now open—MGM Springfield in August 2018 and Encore Boston Harbor in June 2019—understanding the dynamic nature of the casino industry's [economic](#)

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especially important, says Tom Peake, lead author of the economic impact report and senior research analyst at the UMass Donahue Institute, a part of SEIGMA.

"Projections of employment, vendor spending, and state and local revenue were important considerations when the Commonwealth chose to award gaming licenses to the casino operators. That's why it's so important that the SEIGMA project studies and makes this information available to the public—how are the casinos actually performing given the dynamic gaming market of the Northeast?"

Plainridge Park revenues rose 6.25 percent in the three years it was operating as the sole casino in the state, from about \$160 million in fiscal 2016 to \$170 million in fiscal 2018. In fiscal 2019, after the opening of MGM Springfield, revenues dropped slightly to \$169 million.

The number of Plainridge Park Casino visitors has decreased each [fiscal year](#), though the average gross gaming revenue per patron has increased by 27 percent, driving the rise in revenues. "While the economic impacts of Plainridge Park Casino to date are clearly positive, it is somewhat concerning to see an increase in spending per patron because it suggests that a smaller number of individuals are spending more," says Rachel Volberg, principal investigator of the SEIGMA study and research professor in the UMass Amherst School of Public Health and Health Sciences. "If this increase in spending is affecting patrons' ability to meet other financial obligations, it would suggest the need to raise awareness about the importance of keeping gambling entertaining and not spending more than one can afford."

According to the employment report, almost half of respondents said they had previously been unemployed or employed part time. About 75 percent of respondents said they had less than a bachelor's degree.

"Analyzing casino employment is critical to understanding whether casino employment can be a pathway to economic stability and prosperity for workers," says lead author Andrew Hall, senior research analyst at the UMass Donahue Institute. "We are investigating these impacts across the state, especially among the most marginalized sectors of the population. The new employee survey gives us insight into casino employees' experience on the ground: why they're seeking employment in this new field, what types of walks of life employees come from, their aspirations and how casino employment fits into their [career goals](#), and their interest in training and career advancement."

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Most of Plainridge Park's employees live near the casino—"so that's money people living in Massachusetts are spending in Massachusetts," Volberg says.

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