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**From:** Jen Bernard <jen@thehouseofcardsmusic.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, May 5, 2017 11:09 AM  
**To:** SGGA Exhibits  
**Subject:** Opposition to HB2190

For public record, this letter in opposition to HB2190 was sent to the following OR senators on 5/5/17:

Chuck Riley  
Alan De Boer  
Mark Hass  
Floyd Prozanski  
Kim Thatcher

Dear Senators,

I'm Jen Bernard, an Oregon resident living in SE Portland. I'm a small business owner (woman-owned business with COBID status) and professional musician who's worked as Artistic Director for Portland's City government (PDX Parks and Recreation *Summer Concerts in the Park*), and who makes a living touring musically and booking bands all over the world.

I'm also a poker enthusiast and a proud member of the vibrant social gaming community here in Portland (and throughout Oregon).

I am writing in opposition to HB-2190, which would redefine social gaming laws in such a way as to threaten the poker culture we know and love in Portland. As a longstanding member of the poker community, I'm utterly deflated that the out-of-state money interests (read: rich Washington casinos) have so much pull in OUR state. Poker is a game of skill which is enjoyed socially and responsibly. It's not the same as casino games.

Our poker community here in Portland is beloved by many, and utterly unique in its ability to bring people together from all walks of life. At any given table, it's common to see a 25-year old skater kid sitting side by side with a Vietnamese grandmother, a middle-aged African American lawyer, a Romanian businessman and a crazy 40-something Middle Eastern artist lady like myself. I've learned a lot about different cultures and different political affiliations, just by sitting at the poker table. It's truly a great equalizer: Despite our apparent differences, we all have a shared love of this game which transcends age, color, gender, religion, ethnic heritage.

The misrepresentation/sensationalism of Oregon's poker rooms by the media and even during House session live testimonies is appalling. I invite any Oregon lawmaker to come into a Portland poker room. These are professionally-run, comfortable, safe settings. And they're small businesses who've painstakingly worked with local lawmakers to comply with laws. They barely stay afloat with daily membership fees and meager food and beverage sales. These are not casinos. If you came to one of these rooms and observed the setting personally, I think you'd instantly recognize the stark difference.

People's love of social gaming transcends the law, I promise you. If these local social gaming clubs are shut down, the game will shift underground. This has the potential for creating unsafe environments.

I'd like to share a letter written by my friend Bella, a skilled, professional-level poker dealer in Portland (who travels all over the country dealing poker series' such as the World Series of Poker with skills she learned here in PDX). This shows a lot of the context from *within* the Portland poker community:

*I know this last year has been especially turbulent for Portland poker. From what I understand, the laws on the books contradict themselves and the practice appears unsustainable.*

*I have been involved in poker in this city for four years. I'm grateful for what the system in place provides me; it allowed me to learn to deal and propel myself in the industry outside of Portland without Dealer school training. I've gained a trade skill without investing any money, only time and effort. Despite a lack of traditional employment security and protections, I appreciate the freedom and opportunity dealing poker in Portland provides. The reason for that is the continuous generosity of the players in the community, and the sincerely collective effort of the staff and volunteers.*

*A longstanding tradition of poker has never been stopped by law- we see the results of banning poker in the state of Texas. Underground, illegal, raked and over-raked games are thriving and enjoying national notoriety among players. The problem is self-explanatory. These environments are obviously less enticing, secure, and legitimate than a poker club in a strip mall- hugely monetarily profitable for the house, completely unregulated and untaxed, proving no employee or player securities.*

*If the Portland poker industry is dramatically shut down, the hundreds of people currently playing regularly are not likely to stop playing. The games are guaranteed to go underground and whatever concerns about labor laws or prize pools the opposition to social gaming has in regards to the industry, a ban ironically grants it the opportunity to become completely self-regulated. As a player and a dealer, for me it is a losing proposition.*

*The rather large group of volunteers currently facilitating social gaming relies on this practice financially, socially, and emotionally. An underground industry greatly narrows the field of available positions and would force the majority into unemployment, isolation, and questionable resolutions.*

*I understand the laws in place make little sense, and the desire for a reform that provides a safe, responsible gaming industry. Nevertheless, I urge those who make these decisions to recognize a ban on poker is a laughable notion. Poker will continue, and we all agree regulations are necessary for an evolved society. Thank you for your time. -Bella Tolmatsky*

I think Bella articulates well the voice of someone within the dealer community and just how many people's lives and livelihoods would be affected if HB2190 passes through the Senate into law. As a player, I am continually impressed with the level of skill and professionalism that our volunteer dealers show. They possess a skill set that is very unique.

Legitimizing dealers as real employees could be a really positive thing for Oregon; time to update the laws.

But not at the behest of the La Center/Washington money interests! Laws should be thoughtfully updated with regard to Oregon's interests and the survival of small businesses in Oregon. Isn't that the objective of lawmakers?

I will personally say: For myself, I truly love low-stakes poker. It's wonderfully social and allows me to meet people of all walks of life, all the while exercising a little mental flex. It's innocent fun with a small amount of monetary incentive. The clubs in Portland are professionally-run and nothing at all like a casino. As a woman, feeling safe is very important to me. I feel safe in these clubs.

I ask of you, Senator, please listen to the voices of the beloved Portland poker community, and not the moneyed interests of the Washington casinos in La Center and Ridgefield. I appreciate your time and willingness to listen.

Sincerely,

Jen Bernard  
7819 SE Henry St.  
Portland OR 97206-6330