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Poorest county is big spender on lottery tickets

March 11, 2015 by [Taylor Bigler](#)

ELLSWORTH — Washington County is the poorest in the state, but its residents spent a million dollars more on lottery tickets in 2014 than did residents of the far more populous Hancock County.

Per capita spending on lottery tickets in Washington County was twice that of Hancock County.

The 32,190 residents in Washington County spent an average of \$280 per capita on lottery tickets last year, according to data from the Maine State Lottery. In all, the county spent over \$9 million on lottery tickets.

Hancock County has a population of 54,845. Its residents spent an average of \$146 per capita on lottery tickets, for a total of \$8 million.

Nearly a quarter of Washington County residents live below the poverty line, compared to the statewide average of 13.6 percent. About 14 percent of Hancock County residents live below the poverty line, according to 2013 U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

“What you see in those numbers is that the Maine state government is openly cheating and exploiting low- to middle-income citizens in that county,” said Les Bernal, national director of Stop Predatory Gambling, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. “People playing scratch tickets and other forms of lottery games are hoping that these tickets will help them pay their bills at the end of the month.”

Tom’s Mini Mart in Machias outsold Hancock County lottery ticket vendors. Tom’s sold a total of \$485,000 in tickets. In Hancock County, Tideway Market in Hancock sold the most, with \$448,000 in ticket sales.

Bernal said one reason for the higher ticket sales in Washington County is that the state advertises lottery tickets more prevalently in lower-income communities than in wealthier areas.

“These are rigged games; the more you play the lottery, the more money you will lose,” Bernal said. “It is a mathematical certainty.”

On the other hand, the Maine State Lottery is a big source of revenue for the state. The agency had its highest-grossing year to date in 2014, and it transferred \$51.7 million of its revenue into the state's General Fund. Since 1974, it has sent over \$1.19 billion into that fund.

According to Maine State Lottery estimates, the agency is on track to transfer a hefty \$56.1 million into the General Fund this year. The lottery also distributed nearly \$150 million to prizewinners, and \$15 million in commissions to lottery vendors.

If the Bureau of Alcoholic Beverages and Lottery Operations has its way, it will introduce Keno to 135 locations in the state on May 26.