



**Connecticut Conference
United Church of Christ**

125 Sherman Street
Hartford, CT 06105-2281

Testimony in Support of H.B. 5306: An Act Concerning a Comprehensive Study of Gambling in Connecticut and;

**Testimony in Opposition of H. B. 5305: An Act Concerning a Request for Proposals to Qualify An Entity To Develop A Casino Gaming Facility in the State
Submitted by, Michele Mudrick, Legislative Advocate,
Connecticut Conference, United Church of Christ, March 9, 2018**

Representative Verrengia, Senator Guglielmo, Senator Larson, and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee,

I am Michele Mudrick, Legislative Advocate for the Connecticut Conference, United Church of Christ and Executive Director of the Coalition Against Casino Expansion in Connecticut (CACE).

Our Coalition against Casino Expansion in CT (CACE) is a group of 14 faith communities and organizations representing over a million people in Connecticut. Our Coalition spans a broad range of progressive and conservative viewpoints. We have joined together in a non partisan alliance to oppose the legalization of off reservation commercial casino gambling. We have come together to urge that no new casinos be built in our state. I am writing today in support of H.B. 5306 and in opposition to H.B. 5305.

I am also writing on behalf of the 237 congregations and more than 67,500 people in our state's churches. In fact, the United Church of Christ (UCC) is the largest Protestant denomination in Connecticut. Nationally, the UCC has more than 5,700 congregations with nearly 1 million members. In 1974, 1977, 1979 and again in 1994, the assembled delegates and ministers of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ met and voted on Resolutions which call upon the Connecticut Conference to oppose expanded gambling.

We are in support of H.B. 5306: An Act Concerning a Comprehensive Study of Gambling in Connecticut. However our support assumes that the comprehensive study will be conducted by a truly independent, objective party that has no ties to the Mashantucket or Mohegan Tribes or anyone in casino industry. Mr. Adam Steinberg, the Executive Vice President of Spectrum Gaming Group (the group that did a study for Connecticut in 2009) testified at the March 1, 2018 Informational Hearing on Gaming that Spectrum has performed work for our Tribal Nations here in Connecticut. The comprehensive study must be performed with no conflict of interest or bias. We recommend hiring an independent expert or experts who can give our state a true picture of the social and economic costs of casinos.

We are in opposition to H.B. 5305 : An Act Concerning the Regulation of Gaming and the Authorization of a Casino Gaming Facility in the State. The Institute of American Values published a report entitled "Why Casinos Matter: Thirty-One Evidence-Based Propositions from the Health and Social Sciences." This report was created by the Council on Casinos, an independent, nonpartisan group of scholars and leaders who joined together to examine the role of casinos in American life.¹ This report's research shows that gambling is highly addictive, that casinos depend on problem gamblers for up to 50% of their revenue, that living close to a casino increases your chance of becoming a problem gambler, that the benefits of casinos are short-term

¹ Institute for American Values



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and easy to measure while the costs are longer-term and harder to measure. Furthermore, casinos drain wealth from communities, weaken nearby business, hurt property values, reduce civic participation, increase the risk of broken families and increase crime and bankruptcy in communities.² There is no justice in using addictive gambling machines to obtain revenue from these most vulnerable populations.

According to Earl Grinols, the leading expert on the study of casinos in communities, there are many hidden social costs of gambling. These costs include crime costs, business and employment costs, bankruptcy costs, suicide costs, illnesses related to pathological gambling, social service costs, and family costs. Grinols reported factoring in all the economic and social cost, these costs outweigh the benefits 3 to 1.³

There is very little evidence that casinos strengthen a state or municipality. Jobs and the economy are crucial for all Connecticut residents. We need good jobs and need to grow our economy. But casino jobs come at the cost of other jobs in the communities surrounding a casino. When a casino is built in a community, the local restaurants, local entertainment venues, local retail establishments and other businesses cannot compete with the casino. Many businesses are negatively impacted or end up closing. Independent experts and studies have concluded that the presence of a casino does far more harm than good, and the social and economic costs to casinos are far greater than the benefits of job creation and generating revenue. As a pastor from Massachusetts mentioned, casinos are like a vacuum, they suck the money out of the local economy instead of pumping it in. People go to the casino, eat in the casino, sleep at the casino hotel, shop at the casino, gamble at the casino, fill their gas tank at the casino gas station and go home. They do not spend their money in the local economy.

Additionally, we need to create jobs that add value, create real products, provide a living wage and focus on jobs in industries that are not declining in potential. The market for casinos is saturated. There are close to 70 casinos in the Northeast and there are over a 1,000 casinos in the forty states that have them. When Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun opened there were only 12 casinos in the Northeast, all in Atlantic City and half of the revenue was from out of state. Now the Northeast is saturated with casinos so it is mostly Connecticut residents losing their money.

The two existing casinos in Connecticut laid off thousands of workers the past few years and their profits are down 40%. A 2016 study by the Rockefeller Institute of Governments (the leading independent privately financed organization in the United States whose job is to advise states and municipalities across the country) warned states that while casinos may generate short term revenue, it is quickly reversing and declining.

Building more casinos will create more addictive gamblers which has huge societal costs. In 2009, the state sponsored study found that there was a 400% increase in arrests for embezzlements in Connecticut since the casinos arrived, an increase of ten times the national average. In 2014 Western Connecticut State University did a study and found that the number of violent crimes, murder, rape, robbery, aggregated assault increased around the two casinos, despite in Connecticut as a whole going down. Theft crimes increased 40% and there were also increases in non violent crimes such as prostitution and illicit drug use.

² Institute for American Values

³ The Hidden Social Costs of Gambling



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How can we think we can enhance our community when we are making people poorer? I have heard many heartbreaking stories from pastors, many in the areas surrounding Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun as well as throughout the state. People often come to our churches asking for money to pay their rent or put food on their tables because they spend all their money in the casinos. Pastors would visit parishioners in their home and they were eating cat food because they spent all their money in the casino.

According to the UCONN School of Medicine, the growing gambling epidemic is hitting lower socioeconomic groups that hardest and the resulting societal costs are being borne by employers, law enforcement, social welfare agencies and the healthcare system. Gambling is a serious addiction, that is not often talked about because there is so much shame around it. The National Council of Problem Gambling estimates that one in five gambling addicts attempts suicide, a rate higher than any other addiction.

The studies show that casinos are poor economic drivers and multipliers. According to the The United States Bureau of Economic Analysis, the US consumer economy has an economic multiplier of 2 to 3 which means that for every dollar spent the re-spent dollars double or triple the economic increase but a casino multiplier is below 2 at best and according to a University of Massachusetts study the starting point for casinos is a negative multiplier. Casinos make communities poorer, they do not build stronger communities.

According to the Quinnipiac University poll released on March 11, 2015, three in four Connecticut voters oppose having more casinos in Connecticut. The Coalition Against Casino Expansion in CT (CACE) represents the people most affected, the public, over one million people and the public is saying no more casinos in Connecticut.

All of God's children deserve opportunities to live and thrive in their communities and putting a casino in a community is not a way people can thrive. There are better strategies for creating jobs and promoting economic growth in Connecticut that don't come with the significant downsides that casinos bring.

The members of the Coalition Against Casino Expansion in Connecticut include:
Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ – Episcopal Church in Connecticut – Connecticut League of Women Voters – Connecticut Catholic Conference -- Family Institute of Connecticut – New England Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America – Connecticut Association for Human Services – Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport – Advocacy Unlimited, Inc. – Farmington Valley American Muslim Center and Bridgeport Islamic Community Center - Resident Bishop New England Conference of the United Methodist Church – American Baptist Churches of Connecticut – Presbytery of Southern New England

Thank you for your work and the opportunity to supply written testimony in support of H.B. 5306 and in opposition to H.B. 5305 and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Blessings,
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God is still speaking,

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