



**Connecticut Conference
United Church of Christ**

125 Sherman Street
Hartford, CT 06105-2281

**Testimony in Support of H.B. 7290: An Act Concerning Studies of the Effects of Legalized Gambling and;
Testimony in Support of H. B. 7330 An Act Concerning a Study of Online Gambling
And
Testimony in Opposition H.B. 7331 An Act Concerning Sports Wagering in the State
And
Testimony in Opposition to H.B. 7334 An Act Establishing a Commission on Gaming**

**Submitted by, Michele Mudrick, Legislative Advocate,
Connecticut Conference, United Church of Christ
March 9, 2019**

Representative Verrengia, Senator Bradley, 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. 7290 and H.B. 7330 and in opposition to H.B. 7331 and H.B. 7334.

I am also writing on behalf of the 233 congregations and more than 67,000 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. 7290 and H.B. 7330 acts concerning studies of the effects of legalized gambling and online gambling. 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 the casino industry. We recognize that Spectrum Gaming Group, which did Connecticut's last study in 2009, may bid to do the new study. Mr. Adam Steinberg, the Executive Vice President of Spectrum Gaming Group 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. I would like to emphasize again, that Spectrum Gaming Group is not only a key consultant to the gambling industry, but is affiliated with Spectrum Gaming Capital, which helps finance casinos. Therefore, they are an integral part of the gambling industry and do not qualify as an independent expert. Also, Spectrum's study did not attempt to provide a comprehensive cost/benefit analysis



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so therefore the value of the study was compromised. We would recommend hiring a qualified academic research and analysis team from a first-tier United States university and include a detailed cost/benefit analysis for the state. We support paying for the study from unclaimed lottery tickets.

The 1999 U.S. National Gambling Impact Study Commission enacted by Congress recommended that states conduct periodic cost/benefit studies analyzing the socio-economic impacts of gambling activities, especially before any expansion of gambling takes place. Connecticut is required by law to conduct a gambling impact study every ten years. The last study was done in 2008 and issued in 2009. Based on both Connecticut law and the National Commission's recommendations, we strongly encourage the legislature to approve undertaking this study this year.

We are in opposition to H.B. 7334 : An Act Establishing a Commission on Gaming. Establishing a Commission on Gaming would put more power in the hands of a few people, rather than the entire legislature. The Gaming Commission could control all gaming policy in the state and therefore the voices of Connecticut's citizens would not be heard. We believe the residents of Connecticut should decide where and if gambling should increase in our state, not a few individuals. We oppose it because we are concerned that the commission would consist exclusively of pro-gambling people or people in the gaming industry.

If a Commission on Gaming is established, the Commission must include individuals with expertise in problem gambling, health policy and statistical training. The Commission's responsibilities should also include public reporting of problem gambling data. We suggest an annual report that tracks problems with gambling such as embezzlements, increases in problem gamblers, weakening of nearby businesses, reductions in property values, increases in broken families, increases in crime, bankruptcy, suicides, illnesses related to pathological gambling, social service costs, increases in school related costs such as ESOL programs for casino worker's children, DUI data etc. Police, as part of a DUI investigation, ought to record where a person had their "last drink" and police departments should be required to report last drink data on a quarterly basis.

According to Earl Grinols, the leading expert on the study of casinos in communities, there are many hidden social costs of gambling. These include crime costs, business and employment costs, bankruptcy costs, suicide costs, illnesses related to pathological gambling, social service costs, and family costs. Factoring in all the economic and social cost, these costs outweigh the benefits 3 to 1.

The 2009 State 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. A 2014 Western Connecticut State University study found that the rate of violent crimes such as murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault increased around the two casinos, despite that in Connecticut as a whole the rate decreased. Theft crimes increased 40% and there were also increases in non violent crimes such as prostitution and illicit drug use. The National Council of Problem Gambling estimates that one in five gambling addicts attempts suicide, a rate higher than any other addiction.

¹ The Hidden Social Costs of Gambling



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We are also opposed to H.B. 7331 An Act Concerning Sports Wagering in the State. Sports betting is especially dangerous for American kids. Studies show that children in those countries with legal sports gambling are repeatedly exposed to harmful messages and advertisements about sports gambling. It normalizes gambling for kids.

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. 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 associated with more casinos.

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 and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Blessings,
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Les Bernal, Stop Predatory Gaming



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