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February 6, 2013

Connecticut General Assembly
Public Safety and Security Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3600
Hartford, CT 06106

**RE: Prepared Testimony in Support of HB 5277
An Act Legalizing and Regulating Mixed Martial Arts**

Honorable Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee:

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the rapidly growing sport of mixed martial arts. I would especially like to thank Co-Chairs Senator Hartley and Representative Dargan, Vice Chairs Ayala and Verrengia and Ranking Members Guglielmo and Giegler for allowing me to participate in the hearing today.

By way of some background, my name is Michael P. Mersch. I am the Senior Vice President of Business & Legal Affairs and Assistant General Counsel for Zuffa, LLC ("Zuffa") dba Ultimate Fighting Championship® (the "UFC"). Prior to joining the UFC approximately 6 years ago, I was Chief Legal Counsel for the Nevada Athletic Commission for 7 years. I have appeared before several legislative committees across the country and internationally and have met with representatives from many states to inform, educate and answer questions related to the sport of mixed martial arts and oversight and regulation thereof.

WHAT IS MIXED MARTIAL ARTS?

Mixed martial arts ("MMA") is an exciting, intense and evolving unarmed combat sport in which competitors use interdisciplinary forms of various martial arts, include jiu-jitsu, judo, karate, boxing, kickboxing, wrestling and others, to their strategic and tactical advantage in a supervised match governed by strict rules and regulations to ensure the protection of the participants. Scoring for mixed martial arts events is based on athletic-commission approved definitions and rules for striking (with the hands, feet, knees or elbows) and grappling (submissions, wrestling, throws or takedowns).

WHAT IS "ULTIMATE FIGHTING"?

Ultimate Fighting® is a proprietary term and registered trademark owned by Zuffa. It is mixed martial arts competition between elite level professional fighters who utilize the disciplines of jiu-jitsu, karate, boxing, kickboxing, wrestling, and other forms in UFC promoted events. UFC competitors are among the best-trained and conditioned athletes in the world. Safety is of paramount concern to the UFC's ownership and management. **It is noteworthy that no competitor has ever been seriously injured in a UFC event.**



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HISTORY OF THE UFC®

Started in 1993, the Ultimate Fighting Championship® brand is entering into its 20th year of operation as a professional mixed martial arts promotional organization offering the premier series of MMA sports events. The UFC organization follows a rich history and tradition of competitive MMA dating back to the Olympic Games in Athens dating from 648 BC and the sport of Pankration.

About 90 years ago, a Brazilian form of MMA known as Vale Tudo (which translates to “anything goes”) sparked local interest in the sport. Then, the UFC organization brought MMA to the United States. When it first began, the goal was to find “the Ultimate Fighting Champion” with a concept to have a tournament of the best skilled athletes from the various disciplines of all martial arts, including karate, jiu-jitsu, boxing, kickboxing, grappling, wrestling, sumo and other combat sports. The winner of the tournament would be crowned the champion.

In January 2001, under the new ownership of Zuffa, the UFC brand completely restructured itself and began to work with various states to change MMA into a highly organized and controlled sport. As a result, the UFC now offers approximately 12-14 live pay-per-view events and 20-25 live television events annually through network, cable, satellite, mobile and Internet providers. UFC® programming is broadcast in approximately 148 countries and territories reaching 800 million homes worldwide in 20 different languages. In Connecticut, the UFC can be watched on pay-per-view, Fox Broadcast Network, FX Network and FUEL TV.

Ancillary businesses now include UFC.com with over 6 million unique visitors per month, the best-selling UFC “Undisputed” videogame franchise distributed by THQ and our new videogame franchise soon to be released by EA Sports, UFC Gym™, UFC Fight Club affinity program, UFC Fan Expo™ festivals, branded apparel, trading cards, articulated action figures and other media including best-selling DVDs and a U.S. bi-monthly magazine.

REGULATION REQUIRED FOR SAFETY AND INTEGRITY OF SPORT

The UFC organization has always embraced the motto of running towards regulation rather than away from it. In 2001, the UFC was purchased by Zuffa with an express goal to do what the previous owners had not – fully embrace regulation in every state. Our primary goal was and is cooperation with, and operation under, the guidelines of State Athletic Commissions in an effort to establish mixed martial arts as a legitimate and sanctioned sport and to develop the full set of rules necessary to make the sport legal and fighter safety the paramount concern.

In early 2001, the New Jersey State Athletic Control Board, along with representatives from the Nevada and California Commissions and other interested parties, including promoters, participants and officials, met to develop the Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts. These rules govern the conduct of participants while engaging in the sport. Those rules are the basis for



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regulation in each of the jurisdictions that have taken the necessary steps to properly regulate this sport.

The UFC strives for the highest levels of safety and quality in all aspects of the sport and has always believed this was best done under the auspices of proper regulation. The UFC firmly believes in adherence to all required medical testing and typically goes well beyond the requirements of certain states to ensure the health and safety of the participants.

Today, mixed martial arts is regulated and recognized by many of the world's most prestigious sports regulatory bodies including the Nevada, New Jersey, California, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas and Massachusetts State Athletic Commissions and we hope that Connecticut will see fit to properly regulate the sport as well. In all, MMA is legal and thriving in 48 states across the country. Further, 45 states, the District of Columbia, many Tribal Lands such as the Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods, and the majority of the provinces of Canada have passed legislation and/or regulations to properly regulate the sport of mixed martial arts. The time has come for Connecticut to join that list.

OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FOR MMA LEGISLATION IN 2012

During the 2012 legislative session, the language of the legislation before this Committee had tremendous support. The bill last year (SB 326) passed the Public Safety and Security Committee 21-2; passed the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee 46-4; and passed the General Law Committee 13-1. There was overwhelming support for the bill in the Senate; however, SB 326 was not called to a vote and died on the Senate Calendar.

ECONOMIC BENEFIT FOR CONNECTICUT

MMA events would provide direct, indirect and ancillary economic benefits to the state. The state would derive revenue from the tax on tickets to the events. Restaurants, hotels and parking would also be positively impacted by MMA fans attending events. Additionally, at arenas such as the XL Center in Hartford, and the Webster Bank Arena in Bridgeport, additional high paying mostly union jobs would be created.

MMA is available to the residents of the State of Connecticut right now through network and cable television and pay-per-view distribution in their homes, via the internet and their mobile devices, at the local restaurants and taverns they patronize and by driving to neighboring jurisdictions and at the Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods Casinos to attend events live in person. What the State of Connecticut is missing, however, is the opportunity to derive the economic benefit from holding safe and properly regulated live events at venues around the state.



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CONCLUSION

Once again, thank you for your consideration of this important legislation and for allowing me to testify before this Committee. We would respectfully urge the Committee to pass the legislation that is pending before it concerning mixed martial arts. I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you may have and to discuss other more specific issues related to the sport including the safety of the competitions, the dedication and skill level of the athletes and the potential economic impact mixed martial arts may provide.

Sincerely,

Michael P. Mersch