

Esteemed chairs and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee:

I am former Connecticut congressman Bob Steele, and I am testifying in opposition to Proposed Bill No. 5378.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on the proposal to open slots casinos in selected OTB facilities in CT.

One would hope that the committee and the legislature would take a forceful stand against the proposal, which is a bad idea for several reasons.

First, the casino business is declining or topping out in an increasing number of states including Connecticut.

Second, slots casinos are the worst form of casino gambling. They cater overwhelmingly to local, low-income people, while according to a recent MIT study entitled "Addiction by Design" today's slots have become highly addictive computers which obtain 40-60% of their profits from problem gamblers. The proposed slots casinos would add thousands of new slot machines and create thousands of new CT gamblers together with an increase in the social, economic, and public health problems that come with gambling addiction.

Third, slots casinos produce relatively few jobs, and those they create are predominantly low-skill, low-paying jobs.

Fourth, we are learning more and more about the negative influence of CT's existing casinos. According to a 2014 study from Western Connecticut State University, the number of violent crimes (including murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) increased in the surrounding towns in the years after the casinos opened despite a sharp drop in violent crime nationally and in CT as a whole, while the value of property crime in those town skyrocketed by nearly 40%.

According to the study's author, Prof. Francis Muska, interviews with local police and judicial officials also indicated increases in crimes such as prostitution and illicit drug use. Shortly, after release of the study, the AP reported that a federal and state task force was looking into what it called the "pervasive use" of websites to solicit prostitution as Foxwoods.

Fifth, the university study follows a 2013 report from the Bi-Partisan Institute of American Values in NY on casino gambling's growing impact on the nation as a whole. According to the report, the long-term costs of the slots-heavy casinos exceed their benefits by 3-1. They drain wealth from communities, weaken nearby businesses, and reduce civic participation, family stability, and other forms of social capital that are at the heart of a successful community.

And finally, a just-released United Way study reports that 474,000 households in Connecticut – fully 35 percent – are already struggling to support themselves. The last thing they need is more state-sponsored encouragement to gamble.

Senator Hwang and I believe strongly that more slot machines are not an answer to Connecticut's financial problems. Instead of encouraging people to gamble away their money, we need to attract productive, living-wage jobs, promote stable revenue streams and end the runaway spending that has put the state billions of dollars in debt.

Bob Steele  
Former Connecticut Congressman