



State of Connecticut

SENATE

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Feb. 5, 2015

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

I am Senator Tony Hwang, and I am testifying in opposition to Proposed Bill No. 5378.

Given your Committee's charge, to oversee matters concerning public safety and security, I hope when looking at this proposed bill through that lens you will see the costs of video slots far outweigh any perceived benefits.

Connecticut's casinos may have gotten off to a spectacular start, attracting more than half their combined customers from out of state, creating 20,000 casino jobs, and sending hundreds of millions of dollars a year to the state treasury. But the monopoly that enabled that success is over, and with the jobs and revenue steadily declining, we are becoming increasingly aware of the casinos' negative effects.

The casinos have created a pervasive gambling culture in southeastern Connecticut; they've skewed the region's economy heavily toward low-wage service jobs; and they were followed by a sharp spike in the number of Connecticut residents seeking treatment for gambling addiction.

Despite a steep drop in the U.S. crime rate, including a 42% decline in violent crimes for Connecticut since the casinos arrived, a study by Professor Francis Muska of Western Connecticut State University shows that violent crimes in towns surrounding the casinos declined by only 9 percent, while the value of property losses associated with those crimes skyrocketed by nearly 40 percent. Interviews conducted by Muska with police and judicial officials also indicated a significant increase in non-violent crimes, such as prostitution and drug use.

The study comes on the heels of a 2013 report from the Institute for American Values in New York on casino gambling's growing impact on the nation as a whole. According to the report, the long-term costs of the new regional and local casinos exceed their benefits by 3-1. They drain wealth from communities, weaken nearby businesses, and spread gambling addiction while reducing volunteerism, civic participation, family stability, and other forms of social capital.

Proponents of this bill will likely point to potential revenues the state could reap from video slots, and how that is desperately needed given the intense budget pressures we face. Do we really want to balance our budget with money our own citizens lost at casinos? That simply does not feel morally sound, let alone sustainable.

Simply put, there is no location in Connecticut where we should authorize video slot machines, or any expansion of gambling for that matter. The numbers will never add up.