

Testimony of Representative Ezequiel Santiago
Public Safety Committee
Tuesday, March 17, 2015

Senate Bill #1090, AN ACT CONCERNING GAMING.

Good afternoon Chairman Larson and Chairman Dargan:

I am Representative Ezequiel Santiago and I am here to speak on SB# 1090. I am in favor of this committee moving this bill forward.

This legislation will allow our state's two tribal casinos to compete in a very aggressive and growing gaming market. New York's gaming market has successfully siphoned off almost 35% of Connecticut's casino market. This has come about chiefly by expanding their Aqueduct and Yonkers pari-mutuel facilities to allow slots. Once MGM opens up in Massachusetts, Connecticut's gaming market will be further eroded.

However, I am very disappointed that Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods representatives have decided to build three stand-alone casino's instead of utilizing Connecticut's existing pari-mutuel's located at Bradley Teletheatre in Windsor Locks, Sports Haven in New Haven, and Shoreline Star Greyhound Park in Bridgeport, which is in my district.

For the past three years, all discussions I have heard, including those coming from a legislative study committee headed by my former Bridgeport colleague Senator Andres Ayala, recommended that we determine a way to formulate an agreement with the two tribes to utilize the existing pari-mutuels and their Connecticut operator, Sport Tech, to fight off the onslaught of competition coming from nearby border states New York and Massachusetts. The study also found that the gaming industry was retooling their pari-mutuels throughout the country with great success because the market showed that people liked convenient gaming instead of long trips to Connecticut or New Jersey casinos. People would rather travel 20 minutes versus the hours it may take to drive to a traditional casino.

SB 1090 reflects none of these trends, which are gaming market facts. It also makes the most logical sense to do this for the following reasons:

1. The existing pari-mutuels have been licensed gaming facilities for almost 40 years
2. They are zoned for gaming
3. There is plenty of adequate parking
4. There is room for expansion if needed
5. They are operated by Sport Tech, a Connecticut company whose headquarters is based in New Haven.
6. It would secure the 500 Connecticut jobs already employed by the pari-mutual industry and would ensure many more if all parties agree on this concept.
7. It will help the urban areas of New Haven and Bridgeport thorough, increased revenue, jobs and economic activity
8. It would pay property tax to all host communities
9. The revenues from these facilities could begin generating for the Tribes, the State of Connecticut, Sport Tech and the host towns within 90 days with very little capital outlay. Plus, they could lease the machines for greater operational economic efficiency.
10. All of the above would create a unique cooperation between all parties - a true win for all and perhaps a model for future cooperative endeavors.

Connecticut's legislative debate of 1991-92 put the Connecticut owned and operated Jai Alai and dog tracks out of business because the State's tribes wanted an exclusive on gambling. The 1995 casino debate was detrimental to Bridgeport because of tribal exclusivity on gaming arrangement.

Bridgeport, by the way, has no casino. As we offer "win-wins" for tribal gaming, we should include a Connecticut industry that has operated successfully for forty years and has contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to the State coffers.

The State's tribes plan to build three casinos in unnamed municipalities at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars will have significant hurdles to overcome. They will need local zoning, licensing, parking, traffic studies, public hearings and more, and may result in lawsuits now that they have decided to build off of sovereign tribal land.

It will potentially take years to build these facilities, if they are ever actually built at all. Plus, they will continue to lose all that anticipated yearly revenue until they are opened, that is, if indeed they are ever opened. The tribes are basing their future on a "maybe" proposition.

I suggest amending this bill so that it would place the slot machines in existing facilities. This will create win-wins for all parties and encourage future cooperative ventures down the road that will benefit many municipalities across the state.

Thank you.