

Public Hearing
Public Safety Committee
Testimony Presented by Keri Hoehne, Organizing Director, UFCW Local 371
SB 1090 AAC Gaming – Support

Good afternoon Senator Larson, Representative Dargan and Members of the Public Safety Committee.

My name is Keri Hoehne and I am the Organizing Director of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 371, which represents over eight thousand members in Connecticut and Western Massachusetts. Our membership works in many industries, including retail, food processing, healthcare, transportation, and as bartenders, bar porters, hosts, and beverage servers in beverage department at Foxwoods Resort and Casino.

I am here to thank you for raising this proposal to allow for up to three new casinos to be built in Connecticut and to urge your support. Our members at Foxwoods have worked hard to build up the casino and contribute to its success. Most of them have worked there since its opening over 23 years ago. Many of those members enjoy not only an income that can support their families, but strong benefits and safe working conditions. As a result of their union casino jobs, they have raised families, built homes and contributed to their communities.

While bargaining a first union contract in these difficult economic times was challenging, our members stood together and now, in addition to increased wages and protected benefits, have job security and a process for standing up for themselves and their coworkers. However, we have already begun to witness the loss of good, benefit level positions as the result of reduced income to the casino. If we do not do something to slow the export of casino and related hospitality jobs to our neighbors in Massachusetts and New York, we stand to not only lose thousands more good union jobs with strong wages, but also a large part of Connecticut's tax base.

More casinos are being built. We are going to have more competition. That we know. The question is how do we, as leaders and citizens of Connecticut, react to that reality? For our members and the thousands of workers just like them, taking this step is not only bold- it is necessary. In order for our good union jobs to continue, our employers must grow and prosper, and this is the best way to ensure that happens.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.