

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1090, AN ACT CONCERNING GAMING
TESTIMONY TO THE PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY COMMITTEE
SUBMITTED BY: DR. STEPHEN M. COAN, PRESIDENT AND CEO, SEA RESEARCH FOUNDATION
MARCH 17, 2015**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Steve Coan and I am the President and CEO of Sea Research Foundation which operates Mystic Aquarium. I also serve on the State of Connecticut Tourism Advisory Council and have been closely involved with efforts to improve the promotion of Connecticut as a world class tourism destination.

I am here today to support the addition of a third casino in the State of Connecticut close to the Massachusetts border.

Connecticut is investing heavily in tourism. Some of us would like to see more investment, consistent with or greater than other states, including many in New England. Investment in marketing the state has been proven to have a multiplier effect on the economy through the following key indicators: sales taxes generated to the state, jobs, income taxes and local property taxes. Tourism is a multi-pronged industry that has, at its core, entertainment experiences, and we know that casino experiences are increasingly a core entertainment experience that tourists want and expect.

In Southeastern Connecticut we believe that we can compete with international destinations such as Orlando, New Orleans and Las Vegas because of the quantity, quality and diversity of our attractions. Key to this is the "nightlife" experiences that Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun bring to the region with world class dining, shopping, clubs and shows. The experiences that can be found at either of these facilities on any given night rivals what can be found in any other destination of the nation and the world.

We value the presence of the two casinos in Southeastern Connecticut. They have been good neighbors to the region and to the State of Connecticut. As important as they are to one region of the state, the casinos play a critical role in attracting out-of-state visitors to Connecticut. They are key to bringing conferences and conventions to Connecticut that would likely go elsewhere.

In the present discussion we cannot close our eyes to the fact that the State of Connecticut is highly dependent upon the two casinos as sources of revenue and jobs. Our state budget is directly dependent upon the monthly earnings at both casinos as well as other direct and indirect sources of tax income generated by them. In turn, our cities, towns, schools and people benefit from these revenue sources which contribute exponentially to the state when compared to any other two businesses in the state.

The two casinos in Southeastern Connecticut are already experiencing the deleterious impact of new casinos in the State of New York, expanded gaming in the State of Rhode Island and the

growth of online gambling opportunities. The discussion today is not about the merits of casino gambling. It is not about whether these casinos are good or bad for Connecticut.

The discussion today is about an industry and two businesses whose well-being is intrinsically linked to the economic well-being of the State of Connecticut and who are being threatened by external factors that can and should be mitigated by the intervention of state government. There are many examples of other industries that have benefitted from state assistance to keep them competitive and to assure that jobs remain in the State of Connecticut. This is by no means a precedent setting request.

In essence, the question is whether or not we level the playing field with other state governments, specifically Massachusetts, and directly compete for customers who will go to or stay in Massachusetts rather than come to Connecticut. We know that Connecticut is the target market for casino customers in Massachusetts, especially for the proposed casino in Springfield. Why would we let them take our customers and our jobs?

In Connecticut we have tremendous resources that differentiate us from other places that only have casinos. We have natural, cultural and historic beauty, art museums, aquariums, a zoo, a wonderful science museum, beaches, lakes and mountains. We want people to know and visit Connecticut for these resources, but we cannot and should not let others take away a key market niche in entertainment and experience that we also benefit from and that adds to the attractiveness of our state.

Imagine someone landing at Bradley International Airport, a transportation hub that we are actively trying to grow as an economic engine for Connecticut. Will that weary traveler head 30 minutes north to a new casino complex in Springfield for dinner and a game of chance? Or, will we seek to have that same traveler stay within the borders of the Nutmeg State and spend money here?

This is not about one traveler. It is an example that will be repeated hundreds of thousands of times annually by people coming to or traveling through Connecticut in one form or another. My hope is that you will approve this Bill and that travelers from everywhere in the world will come to Connecticut via plane, rail and car to spend money in our state, support employment, provide for better schools, roads and bridges, and contribute to a quality of life with history, culture and natural resources that we all cherish as citizens of this great state.