

COMMERCE COMMITTEE- PUBLIC HEARING ON MARCH 10, 2016  
TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 5577 - AN ACT REQUIRING THE EVALUATION OF THE COSTS  
AND BENEFITS OF ESTABLISHING CERTAIN COMMERCIAL GAMING WITHIN THE STATE  
OF CONNECTICUT  
CHIEF RICHARD VELKY / SCHAGHTICOKE TRIBAL NATION

Co-Chairs Representative Perone, Senator Hartley, and members of the Committee,

My name is Richard Velky and I am Chief of the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation. I am here to testify on H.B. 5577 - An Act Requiring the Evaluation of the Costs and Benefits of Establishing Certain Commercial Gaming Within the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about this issue.

I am very grateful to this committee for proposing this bill. The Schaghticoke Tribal Nation supports H.B. 5577 because it seeks to do a more thorough data-driven analysis of what authorizing commercial gaming for the first time might mean to the State of Connecticut.

We also support H.B. 5577 because it may allow for a proper examination of what would be the best type of procurement process to realize a new commercial gaming development.

The Schaghticoke Tribal Nation believes that the process outlined in Special Act 15-7 is unconstitutional because it does not allow any other parties to participate except for the two privileged tribes. As many of you know, we have been pursuing an opportunity to create our own gaming entity.

The Schaghticoke Tribal Nation is a Connecticut recognized tribe - just like the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation and the Mohegan Tribe. In fact, the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation is one of the oldest state-recognized tribes in the United States.

The Colony of Connecticut formally recognized our reservation in 1736. We obtained federal recognition as a sovereign nation in 2004. A federal official later said that our application was "among the best and most thoroughly researched petitions ever reviewed" by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The State of Connecticut then vigorously fought our status as a federally-recognized sovereign tribe. This involved a political campaign in which many senior-ranking State public officials made public comments criticizing the Department of Interior's decision. Formal challenges were filed by the State against my Tribe's federal recognition. Eventually the State's campaign was successful and the Department of Interior issued a Reconsidered Final Determination dated October 11, 2005.

The primary reason behind the State's opposition was fear of losing the Pequot Fund as a result of a third casino. Last Session the Legislature began a process for a third casino. Indeed, recently we were unconstitutionally denied the opportunity to start the process required to develop a commercial casino under Special Act 15-7. Understand, we are ready, willing and able to participate in that development process.

I respectfully urge this Committee to support H.B. 5577 so that a proper examination of the facts can be done, which may allow my tribe to participate in an economic development opportunity that would be life-changing for many of our tribe's members. To us, tribal gaming is about creating an economic opportunity for an impoverished people – and if we were permitted to pursue gaming, we would use that opportunity to create jobs, not only for us, but for many thousands of other Connecticut citizens.

Thank You!