

Rev. Dr. Davida Foy Crabtree
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March 8, 2016

To: General Assembly Commerce Committee

Re: **House Bill 5577**: An Act Requiring the Evaluation of the Costs and Benefits of Establishing Certain **Commercial Gaming** within the State of Connecticut.

Honorable Members of the Commerce Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the above bill. It is important that citizens be heard!

I write because from 1980-1991, I was the Senior Minister of a larger church in New London County during the time of the development of the first casino in Connecticut. I was active in a monthly meeting of clergy in the region, and over the years, our meetings became increasingly focused on the ill effects gambling and ancillary activities were having on the families of our communities. Where once our conversations were about the spiritual growth of our members, during this era, our focus had to be more and more on how we could help our people deal day in and day out with gambling addictions, increased alcohol and drug abuse, increased family stress, domestic violence, and divorce.

There is no question that jobs were created, but the social stress on municipal services of all kinds far outweighed any benefits. Pastor after pastor came to meetings with deep concern, and much of that concern continues to this day.

In subsequent years, from 1996 to 2010, I served as the Conference Minister (now retired) for the United Church of Christ in Connecticut, bearing responsibility for the oversight and nurture of the 245 churches of our denomination in our state. In that capacity, I also served as the spiritual leader and teacher among the 90,000 members of our churches. Our tradition is the oldest and largest Protestant church in Connecticut and through that tradition we have always taught that gambling is morally wrong. We have stood against casino and other forms of gambling consistently and do so to this day.

The above bill is critically important as long as the evaluation is conducted by a source independent of financial entanglement with any interested party and according to accepted evaluation standards. Such evaluation must give serious weight to the social, economic, and public welfare costs of adding a casino. It is imperative that the study evaluate as well the differential impact casino gambling (and all gambling) has on the poor. A casino in greater Hartford is not a boon to the wellbeing of our people!

Sincerely, Davida Foy Crabtree