

Commerce Committee Public Hearing
March 10, 2016

Good afternoon, Commerce Committee. I am here in strong support of Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods proposed development of a joint new Casino in the greater Hartford area and opposing HB 5577 An Act Requiring The Evaluation Of The Costs and Benefits Of Establishing Certain Commercial Gaming Within The State of Connecticut. In my role as President of Community Enterprises I have worked closely with Mohegan Sun during the past twenty years and I am proud to acknowledge the tremendous support given by Mohegan Sun to Community Enterprises during these 20 years. Community Enterprises is a non-profit organization that helps individuals with disabilities secure jobs and live in the community. Mohegan Sun has supported us financially and more importantly aligned closely with our mission by hiring 100's of individuals with disabilities.

In 2010 we began a new program with Mohegan Sun that has since become a nationally recognized model. This collaboration speaks to the Mohegan tribe's *Spirit of Aquai* and has led to many great jobs for individuals with disabilities in Southeastern Connecticut. In 1633, along the Thames River, the Mohegan Chief Uncas settled with his clan, the Wolf People. For centuries these Mohegan people have worked and lived with the community to create a better life for both themselves and their non-Indian neighbors. These same traditions guide employees to provide a uniquely Mohegan Sun experience through the spirit of *Welcoming, Mutual Respect, Cooperation and Building Relationships*; this enduring tradition we call *Spirit of Aquai*. This spirit is shown once again as Mohegan Sun demonstrates its commitment to creating a better life for their tribal members and non-Indian neighbors with disabilities by partnering with Community Enterprises in creating this Industry Specific Job Training and Placement Program. Now, Mohegan Sun welcomes guests to their land beside the river as a world-class entertainment destination. *Spirit of Aquai* is the bridge which links Mohegan history to Mohegan hospitality. Mohegan Sun employees are committed to demonstrating each principle of the *Spirit of Aquai*.

Working closely with Mohegan Sun's Human Resource and Staff Training departments we created an Industry Specific Training and Placement Program. In June of 2012 Community Enterprises received the National Best Practices award from the Association of People Supporting Employment First, a trade association of 3,000 plus organizations that are committed to helping individuals with disabilities gain employment. This award was made possible due to the tremendous partnership Community Enterprises has forged with Mohegan Sun Casino and Resort. *The Spirit of Aquai* is a vital component and underlying value for our program. Last year Mohegan Sun received national recognition for their work in employing individuals with disabilities. Mohegan Sun received the 2015 Steps to Success award at the Disability Matters North America Conference. This award was given in recognition of the Job Training and Placement Program partnership between Community Enterprises and Mohegan Sun. Mohegan Sun was also named one of America's Best Employers of 2015 by Forbes Magazine.

In order to maintain employment for individuals with disabilities and to expand diverse employment and training programs in the new casino I find that it is extremely important that our State Legislature support the efforts of Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods in their efforts to partner in the opening of a third casino. My agency and the Connecticut residents with disabilities that we support, would be significantly impacted by the lost opportunities for job training and placement if no action is taken. I would like to ask you to stand up and defend our casino industry businesses and those that partner with them. Connecticut needs the jobs and the accompanying tax revenue that this partnership will provide. We are counting on your support of this new casino venture in helping keep Connecticut strong.

Regards,

Richard W. Venne
President/CEO
Community Enterprises