

Sean C. Emerson, Ph.D.
13 Omelia Road
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7 March 2017

Subject: Testimony regarding opposition to S.B. 957 and H.B. 7239

Dear Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee:

I would like to go on the record voicing my opposition to having a casino in Connecticut outside the Indian tribe reservations. More specifically, I am opposed to having a casino in East Windsor. In my opinion, this effort to site a casino in East Windsor has eroded public trust in our elected officials, is likely to be a failed business venture, will prey on the less fortunate in Connecticut, and is anti-competitive. I apologize that I cannot testify at the 9 March 2017 public hearing in person, but I hope you will take my input into consideration.

I have been a resident of Connecticut since 2000 and moved to the Broad Brook section of East Windsor approximately fifteen years ago. In that time, I have never observed the Selectmen of this town attempting to negotiate in secret on a project so impactful without taking into consideration the will of the people. Since I do not have a say in my own town, where I will be affected by the presence of this potential casino, I have been forced to appeal to the Connecticut General Assembly for help.

The argument has been made that this potential casino does not require a town referendum because it is already zoned for entertainment and any business could move into the site of the former Showcase Cinemas. However, this is not an ordinary business, in that it does not yet have the legal right to even establish itself in Connecticut. So that appears to make this a matter for public debate. The fact that the East Windsor Board of Selectman took it upon themselves to have a non-transparent process of approval also suggests that they could even have conflicts of interest on the matter. At this point, I would not be surprised if they hired lobbyists to work on their behalf without consulting the town residents.

East Windsor was selected by the MMCT joint venture precisely because town referendums and Democracy interfere with the site selection process. Otherwise, Windsor Locks would have been allowed to complete their own town referendum before MMCT could make their final selection. It also would not have been reported in the media that an advantage of potentially looking at East Hartford was that a town referendum would not be required there either.

I submit that the effort to site a casino outside of the tribal reservations does not appear to support Democratic principles nor have concern for the opinions of the citizens of Connecticut. The process also calls into question why only the Indian tribes are allowed to have a casino rather than allowing an open competitive process.

Foxwoods, Mohegan Sun, and their joint venture, MMCT, are businesses, pure and simple. Their revenue has been dependent on visitors from outside of Connecticut for years, and those visits have been on the decline. The new MGM casino will certainly reduce their revenue stream from anyone coming from the Boston and Northern New England areas while it is the new, shiny place in people's minds. To compete with MGM, Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun should be trying to upgrade their own facilities to make them more appealing. However, that is much more expensive than building a small "convenience" casino, which they can then shut down in a couple of years once MGM is no longer the new place to visit.

East Windsor makes no sense as a location if the goal was to establish a casino to intercept visitors from Western Connecticut and New York, as a location further south would be more appropriate. The concept seems to be predicated on that idea that if someone was 15 to 20 minutes away from MGM, where there will be a larger entertainment complex, they would simply change their minds and pull off the highway to gamble. It is unlikely that someone would schedule a bus trip to a small "convenience" casino rather than a larger venue like MGM or even Foxwoods. Thus, the casino seems to be designed to capture revenue from gambling addicts and locals in North Central Connecticut rather than trying to prevent out of state visitors from doing business at MGM.

I implore you to reject the idea of establishing additional casinos outside of the Tribal reservations in Connecticut. Our focus should be on attracting more positive businesses to the State, not trying to undermine Democratic principles to establish a business that will not benefit our residents. Thank you for taking the time to consider my input on the Committee's deliberations.

Sincerely,

Sean C. Emerson, Ph.D.