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INTERNATIONAL UNION, UNITED AUTOMOBILE, AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA-UAW

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GARY CASTEEL, Secretary-Treasurer

Public Hearing
Public Safety Committee
Testimony Presented by Julie Kushner, Director, UAW Region 9A

SB 957 AAC The Regulation of Gaming and the Authorization of a Casino Gaming Facility in the State - Support

Good afternoon Senator Larson, Senator Guglielmo, Representative Verrengia and members of the Public Safety Committee. My name is Julie Kushner and I am the Director of UAW Region 9A which has more than 50,000 members in all the New England states, New York City, and Puerto Rico. Our membership is very diverse including legal aid attorneys and staff, technical and office professionals, childcare workers, employees at institutions of higher education, light manufacturing workers, and casino dealers. Most relevant to this proposal is UAW's representation of more than 1,500 dealers at Foxwoods Resort and Casino.

I am here to thank you for raising SB957 which would allow the joint venture of Connecticut's two Tribes, Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan Tribe, called MMCT Venture, LLC, to build a casino in East Windsor and to urge your support. With increased competition from neighboring states, we believe it is imperative for Connecticut to act quickly to retain both direct and indirect casino business and jobs, give Connecticut's loyal casino patrons more options for gambling in their state, and protect state revenue.

In 2008, you may remember, UAW and the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe reached a historical agreement to bargain a first contract under amended tribal law without waiving any of the workers' rights under federal labor law. In January of 2010, workers voted by a 3 to 1 margin to ratify their first contract establishing the country's first casino dealer contract negotiated under tribal law.

Union membership has allowed Foxwoods dealers to significantly improve their wages, benefits and working conditions. These dealers are highly skilled and go through extensive training to become proficient at their trade. With a union contract they also have a process for voicing their opinions, concerns and thoughts at work without fear of retaliation.

We have an agreement with the two Tribes that the new venture, MMCT Venture, LLC, will allow all workers to form unions without interference or delay.

Additionally, we are pleased that both Tribes on behalf of the joint venture have agreed to maintain this facility in accordance with Connecticut's smoke free air laws. Our members at Foxwoods have worked through the collective bargaining process to improve conditions related to second hand smoke exposure that have resulted in real protections. That said, it is clear to us that the best and safest protection for workers from second hand smoke is a smoke free work environment.

The state's casinos have not been spared from the downturn in the economy. For the past several years, the Foxwoods workforce has remained stable, however, there is no question in our mind, that without expansion in Connecticut the casino being built in Massachusetts will negatively impact direct and indirect casino jobs in our state.

We are pleased that our agreement with MMCT also provides for current Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun employees and former employees who have lost their jobs as the result of any reduction in workforce to apply and be given preference for positions for which they are qualified at the new casino before the employer hires from outside sources.

And finally, I want members of this committee and legislature to know that these are good jobs. They are jobs that require a great deal of skill, acumen and ongoing training. These jobs pay well and provide good benefits for the employees. In fact, UAW Local 2121 has just over 1,500 members, 85 of whom have been with Foxwoods more than 25 years (Day One Employees), 342 employees who have worked at Foxwoods for more than 20 years and 1,110 with 10 years or more years on the job.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with you, members of the two Tribes and other allies because I know we can all agree that Connecticut Jobs Matter.

JK/cg
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