



**Connecticut Conference
United Church of Christ**

125 Sherman Street
Hartford, CT 06105-2281

**Testimony in Opposition to H.B. 7055: An Act Creating the Connecticut Gambling Commission and Creating a Competitive Bidding Process for a Resort Casino and;
Testimony in Opposition to S.B. 11 An Act Concerning the Authorization of a Casino Gaming Facility in East Windsor and;
Testimony in Opposition to S.B.17 An Act Authorizing Sports Wagering, Internet Gambling and Internet Keno and;
Testimony in opposition to S.B. 665 An Act Concerning Sports Wagering**

**Submitted by, The Rev. Kent Siladi Conference Minister
Connecticut Conference, United Church of Christ
February 26, 2019**

Representative Verrengia, Senator Bradley and distinguished Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee,

I am the Rev. Kent Siladi, Conference Minister for the Connecticut Conference, United Church of Christ. I am writing on behalf of the 233 congregations and more than 67,000 people in our state's churches as well as a leader in the Coalition Against Casino Expansion in Connecticut (CACE). The United Church of Christ (UCC) is the largest Protestant denomination in Connecticut. Nationally, the UCC has more than 5,700 congregations with nearly 1 million members. In 1974, 1977, 1979 and again in 1994, the assembled delegates and ministers of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ met and voted on Resolutions which call upon the Connecticut Conference to oppose expanded gambling.

The Institute of American Values published a report entitled "Why Casinos Matter: Thirty-One Evidence-Based Propositions from the Health and Social Sciences." This report was created by the Council on Casinos, an independent, nonpartisan group of scholars and leaders who joined together to examine the role of casinos in American life.¹ This report's research shows that gambling is highly addictive, that casinos depend on problem gamblers for up to 50% of their revenue, that living close to a casino increases your chance of becoming a problem gambler, that the benefits of casinos are short-term and easy to measure while the costs are longer-term and harder to measure. Furthermore, casinos drain wealth from communities, weaken nearby business, hurt property values, reduce civic participation, increase the risk of broken families and increase crime and bankruptcy in communities.² There is no justice in using addictive gambling machines to obtain revenue from these most vulnerable populations.

According to Earl Grinols, the leading expert on the study of casinos in communities, there are many hidden social costs of gambling. These costs include crime costs, business and employment costs, bankruptcy costs, suicide costs, illnesses related to pathological gambling, social service costs, and family costs. Grinols reported factoring in all the economic and social cost, these costs outweigh the benefits 3 to 1.³ Our state has not done a Comprehensive study on Gaming in Connecticut in over 10 years, to give our state a true picture of the social and economic costs to casinos.

¹ Institute for American Values

² Institute for American Values

³ The Hidden Social Costs of Gambling



God is still speaking,

860.233.5564 • toll free) 866.367.2822 • fax) 860.231.8111 • www.ctucc.org



**Connecticut Conference
United Church of Christ**

125 Sherman Street
Hartford, CT 06105-2281

We see everyday the perils of gambling when members of our churches reach out to us for assistance, both financially and spiritually. The market for casinos is saturated, there are close to 70 casinos in the Northeast and there are over a 1,000 casinos in the forty states that have them. We have two of the largest casinos in the world in our state and that is enough. Since casinos are increasingly cannibalizing each other, a 2016 study by the Rockefeller Institute of Governments, the leading independent privately financed organization in the USA whose job is to advise states and municipalities across the country did a study and they are warning states, like Connecticut that while casinos may generate short term revenue, it is quickly reversing and declining. If we were to grow this industry we would create more addictive gamblers which has huge societal costs. In 2009, the state sponsored study found that there was a 400% increase in arrests for embezzlements in Connecticut since the casinos arrived, an increase of ten times the national average. In 2014 Western CT State University did a study and found that the number of violent crimes, murder, rape, robbery, aggregated assault increased around the two casinos, despite in Connecticut as a whole going down. Theft crimes increased 40% and there were also increases in non violent crimes such as prostitution and illicit drug use.

According to the UCONN School of Medicine, the growing gambling epidemic is hitting lower socioeconomic groups that hardest and the resulting societal costs are being borne by employers, law enforcement, social welfare agencies and the healthcare system. Gambling is a serious addiction, that is not often talked about because there is so much shame around it. The National Council of Problem Gambling estimates that one in five gambling addicts attempts suicide, a rate higher than any other addiction. There is so much shame in gambling addictions that it is very difficult, if not impossible to get people to testify in person.

MIT Professor, Natasha Schull, author of *Addiction by Design*, reported in one study of casual gamblers, 75% of casino visitors were casual gamblers but they made up 4% of gambling revenues.⁴ The author of the study said, “If responsible gambling were successful, then the industry would probably shut down for lack of income.”⁵

Sports gambling will make the problem worse. In a survey of nearly 10,000 adults in Massachusetts, sports bettors had higher rates of problem gambling- 5.7 percent. Gamblers who bet online had even higher problem gambling rates, 18.2 percent.⁶ These online gamblers get caught up into significant financial debt. One of the few countries that has legal sports gambling, Ireland, just issued its first ever national survey on gambling. It found three quarters of online gamblers in Ireland have borrowed money or sold something in order to place a bet.⁷

The people of Connecticut have spoken in the Quinnipiac University poll released on March 11, 2015, that three in four Connecticut voters oppose having more casinos in Connecticut. The Coalition Against

⁴ Natasha Dow Schull, PhD, *Addiction by Design*, Machine Gambling in Las Vegas, pg 267 (2012)

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Rachel A. Volberg et al., *Gambling and Problem Gambling in MA: Results of a baseline population survey*, 52 University of MA School of Public Health and Health Sciences (May 28, 2015)

⁷ “Most online gamblers bet using loans”, *The Times*, Feb 13, 2018



**Connecticut Conference
United Church of Christ**

125 Sherman Street
Hartford, CT 06105-2281

Casino Expansion in CT (CACE) represents the people most affected, the public, over one million people and the public is saying no more casinos in Connecticut.

All of God's children deserve opportunities to live and thrive in their communities and putting a casino in a community is not a way people can thrive. There are better strategies for creating jobs and promoting economic growth in Connecticut that don't come with the significant downsides that casinos bring.

The trend for the future is states led by women and men who are visionary leaders phasing out state-sanctioned gambling. I pray you will see that vision.

The members of the Coalition Against Casino Expansion in Connecticut include:
Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ – Episcopal Church in Connecticut – Connecticut League of Women Voters – Connecticut Catholic Conference -- Family Institute of Connecticut – New England Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America – Connecticut Association for Human Services – Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport – Advocacy Unlimited, Inc. – Farmington Valley American Muslim Center and Bridgeport Islamic Community Center - Resident Bishop New England Conference of the United Methodist Church – American Baptist Churches of Connecticut – Presbytery of Southern New England

Thank you for your work and the opportunity to supply written testimony in opposition to expanded gambling and I would be honored to answer any questions.

Blessings,
The Rev. Kent Siladi
kents@ctucc.org
(860) 761-7109



God is still speaking,

860.233.5564 • toll free) 866.367.2822 • fax) 860.231.8111 • www.ctucc.org