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State of Connecticut
SENATE

ASSISTANT SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

RANKING MEMBER
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

MEMBER
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
COMMERCE COMMITTEE
PLANNING & DEVELOPEMENT COMMITTEE

Testimony of Senator Heather Somers
February 26th, 2019

In Support of:

SB 11: AN ACT CONCERNING THE AUTHORIZATION OF A CASINO GAMING FACILITY IN EAST WINDSOR

SB 17: AN ACT AUTHORIZING SPORTS WAGERING, INTERNET GAMBLING AND INTERNET KENO.

Co-Chair Bradley, Co-Chair Verrengia and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, I am Senator Heather Somers, and I am here to testify in favor of:

SB 11: AN ACT CONCERNING THE AUTHORIZATION OF A CASINO GAMING FACILITY IN EAST WINDSOR

In 2017, after months of hard work, we passed Senate Bill 957; this bill protected more than 9,300 jobs in Southeastern Connecticut, jobs that are vital to many hard-working families. In one of the towns I represent nearly 60% of the population is employed by the casinos. This legislation that was passed would authorize the operation of one off-reservation casino gaming facility in East Windsor, subject to regulation by the Department of Consumer Protection – in fact last year the demolition began at the old Showcase Cinema in East Windsor, where the tribes are planning to put slot machines and table games. In addition to the job security for workers and families, 2017's legislation will help to boost tourism efforts by requiring 10 percent of the gross revenue from table games to be deposited into the statewide tourism marketing account.

I was proud of the work that we did on this issue as I have witnessed first-hand the positive impact the tribes have had on the communities that I represent. To not go forward is a bad precedent to set, as it creates uncertainty for so many families throughout Southeastern Connecticut. At a time when Connecticut is in crisis our citizens want to see progress created-not progress undone. The second MGM or any other casino is allowed to build a casino CT immediately loses every cent going to the state from the current casinos.

As you know, the tribes are working to establish a \$300 million gambling site in East Windsor, Tribal Winds Casino, which would compete with MGM Springfield. The tribes received state approval for that project in 2017, but it has been stalled by the U.S. Department of the Interior's inaction on revising the compact to allow that casino. SB 11 is a bipartisan, bicameral bill which would remove the requirement of the DOI's approval from the East Windsor operation. It aims to encourage business development, job retention, job growth, and increase revenue to the state.

SB 17: AN ACT AUTHORIZING SPORTS WAGERING, INTERNET GAMBLING AND INTERNET KENO.

This bill would allow for online and in-person sports betting at both Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods Resort Casino and would include age and location verification requirements designed to block online access to persons under the age of 21 from betting on sports. It will provide for additional revenues and jobs from the operation of sports wagering, Internet gambling and Internet Keno; enhance the revenue to the state from agreements between the state and federally recognized Indian tribes in Connecticut; ensure that Connecticut's gaming and tourism industries remain competitive with those in surrounding states; and ensure age and physical location verification for participation in Internet gaming.

Connecticut will benefit from these bills. The tribes have worked with Connecticut for the past 25 years in an arrangement that's been beneficial to everybody. As a matter of fact, they've generated \$80 billion for the state.

I want to thank my colleagues in eastern Connecticut. We have come together as Democrats and Republicans to speak in a united voice on behalf of these common sense pro-business measures. I urge the committee to support SB 11 and SB 17.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather Somers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping 'S' at the end.

Heather Somers
State Senator-18th District (CT)