

Dear Members of the Public Safety Committee:

My name is Rev. Candace Whitman and my church is a member of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ. As I have personal ties to the Windsor area and to Fairfield County, I write in strong opposition to the four bills now before the state regarding enhanced opportunities for gambling in Connecticut, via casinos or the internet.

To increase legal gambling at this point is a foolish move on behalf of our legislators as it has been shown that the practice of betting will not guarantee revenue or employment for the long run in the state, two things desperately needed in Connecticut. In addition, gambling brings with it high social costs as it opens the door to addiction, a dimension to gambling that cannot be ignored as it harms the vulnerable among us and strains social service resources.

It would be far more prudent if our leaders continued to work together now to cast a vision for the long term, and set the stage for a healthy populace and thriving economy by investing in growing business sectors, supporting infrastructure, and strong communities.

Moreover, in my work as a pastor, the best results in helping families through difficult times - such as unemployment - is to help them take steps that set a strong foundation for their future. This includes earning their trust and helping them invest in better physical and mental health practices, access resources, obtain education and job skills, and the like. In my experience, helping a family prepare for a good and stable life would never include encouraging opportunities for addiction - as gambling does. In light of this, I find that endorsing and promoting gambling on the part of our legislators as both thoughtless and careless as it holds far more potential for harm to the unemployed, and poses an even greater burden on the poor and those that help them.

I recommend that in place of these proposals -- initiatives that will only prove a detriment to weakened families, struggling communities, and our overall economic picture - that Connecticut create a climate for building legitimate businesses, more job training, as well as strengthened family and community life.

Thank you for your consideration of these arguments against furtherance of gambling in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Candace Whitman

