

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JONATHAN HARRELL II,
YOGA KAMMILI, AND JACOB LUECKE

MEDICAL STUDENTS

UCONN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

PUBLIC SAFETY & SECURITY COMMITTEE

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S.B. No. 146 (COMM) AN ACT AUTHORIZING SPORTS WAGERING, ONLINE CASINO GAMING, ONLINE LOTTERY AND ONLINE KENO.

Proposed S.B. No. 570 AN ACT AUTHORIZING A TRIBAL RESORT-CASINO IN BRIDGEPORT, SPORTS WAGERING, INTERNET GAMING AND INTERNET LOTTERY.

H.B. No. 6451 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING GAMING AGREEMENTS WITH THE MASHANTUCKET PEQUOT TRIBE AND THE MOHEGAN TRIBE OF INDIANS OF CONNECTICUT.

H.B. No. 6512 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING CONSUMER PROTECTIONS FOR SPORTS WAGERING.

Sen. Bradley, Rep. Horn, and Members of the Committee: We are grateful for the opportunity to testify concerning the above-mentioned bills related to the potential expansion of gaming in the state of Connecticut. We are third year medical students at UConn School of Medicine, and under the advisement of the Connecticut Council on Problem Gambling, we are in the process of carrying out a capstone project examining the resources and funding provided to adolescents in our state for education, prevention, and treatment of problem gambling in relation to other states. As future physicians in training who will very soon be serving the people of Connecticut, we understand the implications that addiction, problem gambling therein, can have on one's physical and mental health, relational dynamics, and society at large. Expansion of gaming in Connecticut will surely have positive impacts in the state, yet we would like to acknowledge that problem gambling affects the lives of our future patients and their loved ones, and therefore we feel it our prerogative to share our thoughts on these bills under consideration.

Due to inherent developmental and cognitive immaturities, adolescents are increasingly susceptible to problem gambling, which has been shown to lower self-esteem, increase impulsivity, and even increase their risk of substance abuse compared to peers.¹ Studies have shown that many adolescents who are already participants in online gambling in other parts of the country and world exhibit significantly higher rates of problematic internet use, cyberbullying,

¹ Emond AM, Griffiths MD. Gambling in children and adolescents. Br Med Bull. 2020 Dec 15;136(1):21-29. doi: 10.1093/bmb/ldaa027. PMID: 32932525.

and online contact with strangers.² In conjunction with the increased risk of risky behavior, from a clinical standpoint, the resources needed to screen and diagnose problem gambling among children and adolescents are, essentially, non-existent. The expansion of potential gambling opportunities into video games, sports betting, and other online-based platforms, which adolescents are much more comfortable with and have somewhat unlimited access to, poses concern in the face of these limited resources.

Connecticut has a strong history of gaming, and therein, many who have been raised in this region may have views and practices shaped by the presence of gaming establishments, lotteries, and other avenues of betting. However, once limited by physical premises, ID requirements, and financial constraints, the expansion of gaming to the online universe will provide access to a multitude of demographics once unable to so easily join in, and hence will likely provide revenue boosts to our state. In the same instance, we must consider the truth that adolescents are among the most tech savvy age-groups, and approval of online gaming/keno, e-sport betting, casino games, and lotteries likely means increased ease of access to these gaming mediums by younger populations. Advertising on these sites, per expected business practice, will likely further urge users to bet and test their luck via numerous platforms, inadvertently perpetuating the normalization of risky financial choices and impulsivity among young users.

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of resources available in Connecticut, and across our country, to support youth populations struggling with disordered gambling. When we look to western counterparts like Nevada and California, however, we see proactivity in their coalescence of data to support an avid response to the increasing crisis of problem gambling in their own adolescents.³ Unlike other states, California has a dedicated internet resource to support recovery in youth gambling.⁴ The importance of focusing on youth gambling has reached a crescendo, as prior to the pandemic, 15% of teens surveyed had already interacted with gambling, and with increased time at home and increased computer use, that number is sure to have risen exponentially. The current environment concerning gaming in Connecticut provides not only a chance to change this narrative, but to be ahead of the curve in providing resources for our youth by increasing funding and support for prevention, counseling, screening, and education. As other testimonies have already requested, we ask that a portion of revenue provided by gaming expansion be allotted directly to support of adolescents who may be at risk for, or already involved in, disordered gambling practices.

We are able to screen, diagnose, treat, and offer long-term management of numerous mental health and substance use disorders as medical providers, and yet, with the rapid rise of easy and expanded access to online gaming, we may find ourselves in a treatment stalemate with adolescent populations subjected to unprovisioned involvement in and underfunded

² Gómez P, Feijóo S, Braña T, Varela J, Rial A. Minors and Online Gambling: Prevalence and Related Variables. *J Gambl Stud.* 2020 Sep;36(3):735-745. doi: 10.1007/s10899-019-09923-3. PMID: 31848836.

³ Nevada Council on Problem Gambling. <https://www.nevadacouncil.org/programs-resources/public-awareness-prevention>. Accessed March 17, 2021.

⁴ California Council on Problem Gambling. <https://calpg.org/impacted-youth/#1568857841760-a3367522-0dfa>. Accessed March 17, 2021.

management of disordered gambling. We fully recognize the numerous benefits expansion of gaming in our state will offer, and in the same breath ask for consideration of our future generations and how we might safely integrate and educate a healthy understanding of gaming for them.

Thank you for your time and consideration.