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Testimony on Proposed S.B.11, S.B. 17, S.B. 665, H.B. 7055

LEGISLATION EXPANDING GAMBLING IN CONNECTICUT

By Deacon David Reynolds
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Public Safety and Security Committee
Public Hearing
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Legislative Office Building, Room 1E

The Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference, the public policy office of Connecticut's Catholic Bishops, is opposed to the four bills (S.B. 11, S.B. 17, S.B. 665, H.B. 7055) being considered by the Public Safety and Security Committee to expand casino and other forms of gambling in Connecticut. In March 2017, the Catholic Bishops of Connecticut issued a statement entitled *A Catholic Perspective on Expanded Gambling in Connecticut*, in which they concluded the expansion of gambling would not be in the interest of the common good for the citizens of the state. In that statement, the bishops clearly addressed the demand for revenue versus the negative impacts of its expansion:

"We are mindful that the expansion of casinos in Connecticut would be a potential source of new revenue, but revenues are not the sole criterion of the common good. It is the responsibility of government...to consider all the consequences, both positive and negative, for individuals, families and communities."

In 2009, a study by the Connecticut Division of Special Revenue brought to light the many negative social and economic impacts of the Indian casinos on the local communities. Although the casinos have been good sources of revenue for the state, the benefits to the surrounding communities are highly questionable, and the income to the State has been in dramatic decline. Additionally, multiple studies show that 35-50% of casino gambling revenue comes from problem and pathological gamblers. In other words, the casino industry's business model is dependent upon preying on people with gambling problems and up to half the money government obtains from casinos comes from those individuals and the people around them.

The Conference also believes that other forms of legalized gambling, such as sports wagering and internet gambling, have the same negative social impact on society and further exacerbate the problem of gambling addiction. The concerns over gambling addiction, which leads to debt, bankruptcies, broken families and crime, should far outweigh the perceived financial benefits to our state. According to the UConn School of Medicine, the growing gambling epidemic is hitting lower socioeconomic groups the hardest and the resulting societal costs are being borne by employers, law enforcement, social welfare agencies, and the health care system.

Without question, the State of Connecticut is facing a budget crisis. However, adopting a means to address that issue which preys on vulnerable people and expounds societal problems is not the correct approach. It is not an approach that is in line with the common good and best interests of the people of Connecticut.

The Catholic Bishops of Connecticut, in unison with other religious leaders in our state, urge the Public Safety and Security Committee to act in the common good of the people of Connecticut by opposing adoption of the four gambling bills being heard today, and any future expansion of gambling in our state.