

Speaker Murphy, Chairman Costantino, members of the House Finance Committee, and House Leader Fox, I am Father Gene McKenna, president of Citizens Concerned about Casino Gambling which was founded right here in Newport 31 years ago when an entrepreneur from Massachusetts tried to establish a Casino not far from this hallowed building. We were successful then and we have been advocating against Casino Gambling ever since. Thank you very much for holding this hearing in Newport. We were hoping for better weather to showcase our beautiful island, but perhaps the gloom and the chill of today's weather represents our feelings today regarding the proposal to expand gambling 24/7. Today's hearing gives our membership of over two thousand people allied with so many other individuals and groups, such as Rhode Island Statewide Coalition with their 4000 members statewide the opportunity to urge you to vote against H7040 requiring Video Lottery games to be available 24/7 in Newport and Lincoln. We would also urge you vote in favor of H7161 thus ensuring a statewide positive vote before vlt's could be played between the hours of 1:00 am and 8:00am. There are so many arguments against the expansion of gambling that we want to reduce repetition . Accordingly we thank you for allowing us to present testimony in a panel format. Among other things we plan to speak of the growing problem of gambling addiction. (And isn't a person playing the vlt's between 1 and 8 a.m. as good a definition of problem gambling as one could imagine?) I also picture the spouse at home wondering how late their loved one will arrive home and with how much debt and in what state of mind. So we will also testify about the human and financial costs of problem gambling i.e. broken marriages, lost homes, depression and even suicide. You know from all the data developed by the Paul Sherlock commission of happy memory that some economists estimate that for every dollar that comes into the public treasury it costs the State and local communities \$3.00. We know of the huge deficit that faces this State and we applaud some of those efforts to tighten our belts. But the Providence Journal recently reported that the State will receive \$321 million dollars this year from gambling which is the highest per capita amount in the entire United States. Isn't that also a proof that Rhode Islanders have a problem with gambling? And how can we reasonably try to balance our budget on the backs of some of our already suffering fellow citizens? We cry out for true economic development and not simply an imaginary quick fix whose main product is the creation of more losers. I would also like to distribute this summary of "NO" votes against Casinos over the years in Rhode Island. And Finally in response to Rep. Constantino's concern for help for addicted gamblers, I would say that the easiest way to treat problem gambling is not to create more problem gambling. And so we urge you to defeat Bill #7040 and to pass Bill #7161.