



**Public Safety and Security Committee Public Hearing**

**March 2, 2021**

**Testimony**

**by**

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**Senior Associate Athletic Director**

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

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

Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Committee, my name is Neal Eskin and I am the Senior Associate Athletic Director at the University of Connecticut. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the University concerning the sports wagering legislation currently under consideration.

We appreciate the General Assembly's continuing support of UConn and are grateful for the Committee's efforts to engage the University in dialogue about the impact that gaming in the State of Connecticut may have on student athletes and the community of fans that attend our athletic events.

The University of Connecticut strongly opposes collegiate sports betting. Intercollegiate athletic competitions are conceivably the easiest to influence given the vulnerability of the 18-to-22 year old student athlete population. Unlike professional athletes, who are highly-compensated, student athletes are especially susceptible to attempts by individuals seeking non-public information or to influence competition outcomes. Additionally, student athletes' housing and academic requirements make them more accessible than professional athletes and make them easy targets for harassment by members of the public who lost money betting on UConn sporting events. Participation in intercollegiate athletics is a critical component of a student's overall educational experience. UConn's commitment is to provide them with an excellent academic and athletic experience, while preparing them for success after graduation. It is our responsibility to ensure their health and welfare throughout their participation in our programs. Collegiate sports betting will no doubt make these tasks more difficult. Everything from previously innocent player-fan meet-and-greets to all student athlete interactions with the public will now have to be closely monitored and restricted if collegiate sports betting is legalized.

Currently, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has strict guidelines for member institutions in place regarding gambling. The NCAA believes collegiate sports betting has the potential to undermine the integrity of the sport and can also jeopardize the health and welfare of student athletes. As amateur athletes and young adults, student athletes are vulnerable to undue pressure of

those trying to impact the outcome of a game or contest. Further, the ability to gamble on their sport could result in the exposure of student athletes to a new level of pressure and the influence of others.

Presently, NCAA Bylaws regarding Sports Wagering Activities prohibits staff members of an institution's athletics department and student athletes from knowingly participating in sports wagering activities or providing information to individuals involved in or associated with any type of sports wagering activities concerning intercollegiate, amateur, or professional athletics competition. For example, these individuals may not solicit or accept a bet on a collegiate or professional game for any item of value, participate in internet gambling on sporting events, or participate in fantasy sports leagues that require an entry fee. Penalties for student athletes can result in the permanent loss of eligibility to play collegiate sports or termination for employees.

Some argue that legalizing collegiate sports betting would somehow make things better for our student athletes. We could not disagree more. We believe that legalizing collegiate sports betting will create an unhealthy culture where there is pervasive interest in the physical and mental health of student athletes by bad actors looking to influence game outcomes. We believe it will dramatically increase nefarious activities.

If collegiate sports betting is legalized, UConn and the other collegiate sports programs in Connecticut will have to greatly expand education, training, and monitoring efforts as we endeavor to protect student athletes and the integrity of intercollegiate sporting events played in Connecticut. Limiting public access to our student athletes may also have to become a new reality in these uncharted times. All of this will require new resources and put even more strain on budgets that are overburdened.

While this will be a significant challenge given our budgetary situation, UConn has determined that if sports betting legislation is enacted, it is best for the University to try to cover these additional compliance costs through its own internal resources. We feel this is the best course of action to ensure that the University is not perceived as profiting from collegiate sports betting. As a result, we are asking that no reimbursement for compliance costs be included in sports betting legislation and that no additional funding be added to our state block grant for this purpose.

While we recognize the state's interest in legalizing sports betting, the University strongly encourages restrictions related to collegiate sports betting specifically.

We request that wagering on any regular season or post-season games in which UConn competes, no matter whether those games occur inside or outside of the state of Connecticut, be prohibited. Eight states that have enacted collegiate sports betting have prohibited wagering on their in-state collegiate teams including Delaware, Illinois, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Washington. Four other states, including Kentucky, California, Texas, and Massachusetts, have legislation pending that would prohibit wagering on their in-state collegiate teams as well. We encourage Connecticut to do the same. UConn also urges you to ban post-season tournament betting on individual games featuring Connecticut teams if collegiate sports betting is legalized. UConn believes that this prohibition should include post-season tournament betting on Connecticut teams or, at a minimum, restrict post-season tournament betting on Connecticut teams to the overall outcome of the entire tournament and not the individual games themselves.

Lastly, UConn believes that the wagering of bets on any student athlete's statistical performance (a/k/a proposition bets) should be prohibited. Proposition bets most often take the form of bets on the performance of an individual player, such as the number of catches a football receiver has in the game

or how many points a basketball player scores. These are extremely dangerous bets, which have the ability to create numerous negative outcomes, including overwhelming pressure on student athletes to affect outcomes of games, damage to the integrity of our universities, and increased risk of potential NCAA rules violations which could result in loss of eligibility for student athletes and penalties for the universities. Four states have explicitly banned proposition betting on individual collegiate athletes, including Virginia, Colorado, Iowa, and Indiana. Three additional states considering legislation against proposition betting include Georgia, Nebraska, and Missouri.

The following language would accommodate our requests:

(15) "Sporting event" or "sports event" means any (A) sporting or athletic event at which two or more persons participate and receive compensation in excess of actual expenses for such participation in such sporting or athletic event, (B) sporting or athletic event sponsored by an intercollegiate athletic program of an institution of higher education, or (C) e-sports. "Sporting event" does not include horse racing, [or] any sporting or athletic event sponsored by a minor league or high school, **or an intercollegiate sporting or athletic event that takes place in Connecticut or an intercollegiate sporting or athletic event in which any Connecticut intercollegiate team participates regardless of where the event takes place;** and

(16) "Sports wagering" means risking or accepting any money, credit, deposit or other thing of value for gain contingent in whole or in part (A) by any system or method of wagering, including, but not limited to, in person or over the Internet through an Internet web site or a mobile device, through an electronic wagering platform, and (B) based on (i) a sporting event or a portion or portions of a sporting event, including future or propositional events during such an event, [or] (ii) the individual performance statistics of an athlete or athletes in a sporting event or a combination of sporting events, **or (iii) on collegiate sports tournament games, including sports tournament games in which a Connecticut college team participates provided only that the outcome of the wager is based on the outcome of all games within the tournament.** "Sports wagering" does not include the payment of an entry fee to play fantasy contests, as defined in section 12-578aa of the general statutes, [or] an entry fee to participate in e-sports, *(Note: The following language is only requested if our recommended change to the definition of "sporting event" above is not included)* **or the placing of a wager on the statistical performance or nonperformance of any individual who is participating in an intercollegiate sporting or athletic event that takes place in Connecticut or who is participating in an intercollegiate sporting or athletic event as a member of a Connecticut intercollegiate team.**

We look forward to collaborating on any sports betting bills as the legislative process continues to ensure that the potential financial benefits associated with state-sponsored sports betting are not overshadowed by unintended negative consequences.

In closing, we would like to reiterate our appreciation for your continued support of the University. We are also grateful for this opportunity to provide feedback and would be happy to answer any questions.