

Modified Casino Expansion Bill Advances; East Windsor, Bridgeport Projects Still Possible

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Rep. Joe Verrengia and Sen. Tim Larson, co-chair the Public Safety and Security Committee Friday

HARTFORD, CT — They heard [hours of testimony](#) Thursday about opening up the bidding process for a commercial casino in Bridgeport and scrapping a plan to build another tribal casino in East Windsor, but by Friday evening things had changed.

In order to salvage a [bill, HB 5305](#), that would allow a commercial casino to be built in Bridgeport, supporters of the open bidding process allowed Sen. Tim Larson, D-East Hartford, to strip language from the bill that would have killed plans for the tribal casino in East Windsor.

Earlier in the day, Larson tried to keep the bill from receiving a vote by making sure it wasn't on the agenda for what is likely the committee's last meeting.

"I've been around for a while and this continues to remind me of when Robert Kraft promised to bring the New England Patriots to Hartford in the late 1990's. I'm

disappointed that we continue to offend our tribal partners in this process,” Larson said in a statement 20 hours before the committee meeting. “I have deep concerns about the MGM casino proposal and I will not support legislation that puts Connecticut jobs at risk.”

However, instead of killing the proposal, Larson simply stripped out language that would have scrapped plans for the two tribal nations to build a casino in East Windsor. That casino is supposed to divert traffic from a new MGM Resorts International casino in Springfield, Mass.

The bill ended up passing the Public Safety and Security Committee by a vote of [22-3](#).



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[Sen. Ed Gomes](#)

Sen. Ed Gomes, D-Bridgeport, said he’s for a casino in Bridgeport and he was never against a casino in East Windsor.

He said Larson’s amendment helped the bill get out of committee. He said this is an issue for the entire General Assembly.

Rep. Joe Verrengia, D-West Hartford, who supports an open bidding process, said this was never about Bridgeport or East Windsor. He said it was about which avenue was the best one for the state to pursue to preserve jobs.

He said the East Windsor project is tied up in litigation and it’s unclear how long it will take to wind its way through the DC Circuit Court.

“The one thing that struck me was the lack of progress that’s been made by the tribes,” Verrengia said.

He said the legal issues have complicated the East Windsor casino and this legislation also helps removes “serious legal pitfalls” that were inherent in legislation passed last year that allowed the tribes to move forward.

Other lawmakers on the committee opposed the legislation largely because they don’t believe in the expansion of gaming.

Rep. Daniel Rovero, D-Dayville, said he’s not a big supporter of gambling.

In addition, “I’m never going to live long enough to see them come about,” he joked.

At the same time he worried, what will happen if Connecticut “puts our hope in gambling and marijuana? I think we’re in trouble.”

The bill now goes to the House of Representatives.

Tags: [Joe Verrengia](#), [Tim Larson](#), [Ed Gomes](#), [Bridgeport](#), [East Windsor](#), [tribes](#), [casino](#), [Daniel Rovero](#), [Public Safety and Security Committee](#), [2018hb-5305](#), [dh](#)