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**Written Testimony to the New York State Senate
Racing, Gaming and Wagering Committee**

Opposition to Wagering on Internet Poker in New York

Interfaith Impact of New York State is an organization of congregations, clergy and lay leaders across the state working for the common good through progressive religious advocacy.

We strongly oppose S5302-2015 which would “amend the racing, pari-mutuel and breeding law and the penal law to allow Internet play and wagering on certain interactive poker games,” specifically Texas Hold’em and Omaha Hold’em .

This bill would give every smartphone, home computer and laptop in New York State access to a casino or lottery operated professional poker parlor. It has the potential to put a casino poker room into every home, every family, every dorm, and every place of employment in New York, with all the dysfunctions that go with compulsive Internet game play combined with gambling.

We also point out that the bill fails to comply with the New York Constitution, which places strict limitations on gambling. When the voters authorized a limited number of private casinos, they did not authorize statewide Internet gambling, which is a separate activity that requires another Constitutional amendment before it can be legalized.

All the problems associated with casino gambling are magnified by Internet gambling, which experts report is especially addictive for younger players. Regardless of the skills involved, the vast majority of players lose money, sometimes a great deal of money, in the mistaken belief that they possess skills or luck that they do not. Casinos thrive on the illusion that money is easy and fun to acquire through gambling. This is a bad family value. The reality is that while most people know when to quit, many are unable to stop playing, which can have catastrophic personal, family and community consequences. Among these are increased bankruptcies; home foreclosures and evictions due to unpaid mortgages and rents; increases in crime, especially burglaries, forgeries, embezzlements, prostitution, and spousal abuse; and food insecurity for individuals and families.

Finally, we are deeply concerned about the unknown consequences of introducing a culture of Internet gambling into families throughout the State. This activity sucks money out of the local economy and puts nothing back. Worse, it is social engineering on a massive scale, with a very small upside in short-term revenue compared to the enormous long-term potential costs to State and local governments.

We urge the members of the Senate Committee on Racing, Wagering and Gaming to put the well-being of New York families ahead of short term revenue acquisition and vote “NO” on S5302-2015.

Respectfully Submitted by

Robb Smith

Robb Smith, Executive Director
Interfaith Impact of New York State