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Illinois Church Action on Alcohol & Addiction Problems

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Gambling Alert -May 24, 2022



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Distrust Continues to Intensify Over Mayor Lightfoot's Proposed Casino Project as State Board Moves to Hand Gambling License to Alleged Money Launderer With Ties to Mexican Drug Cartel

While Mayor Lori Lightfoot's administration faces growing opposition from Chicago residents over concerns about the transparency and thoroughness of the review process for the proposed Chicago casino, the latest actions by the key state regulatory body responsible for examining the fitness of the Chicago casino is amplifying calls to kill the casino project altogether.

The Illinois Gambling Board, the government agency charged with overseeing the gambling industry in the state, including the Chicago casino proposal, has advanced an application for an online-only sports wagering license for Grupo Caliente. Grupo Caliente and its owner Jorge Hank Rhon have been cited by the New York Inspector General as "the subject of numerous allegations of illegal activities" and Rhon "has been suspected by U.S. law enforcement and Mexican authorities of illegal money laundering activities related to illicit drug trafficking, particularly with the Arellano Felix drug cartel based in Tijuana."

The national advocacy group Stop Predatory Gambling and Illinois Church Action on

Alcohol and Addiction Problems (ILCAAP) sent a letter to the Illinois Gambling Board outlining the serious concerns with Caliente and its owner Rhon.

The letter to the Illinois Gambling Board also highlighted:

The governor of Baja, Mexico accused Mr. Rhon of being personally responsible for the high crime rate in his state.

A reporter investigating Mr. Rhon's alleged drug use was assassinated and employees of Mr. Rhon's dog racing track were convicted of the murder.

Another employee has disappeared and the case is under investigation.

The Nevada Gaming Board effectively ended all contracts with Grupo Caliente due to concerns with their operations.

Mr. Rhon's dog racing track fails to have animal welfare standards.

Mr. Rhon has faced arrest and fines due to trafficking of wildlife including endangered species as well as illegal firearm possession.

These groups are concerned over the negligence of the Illinois Gaming Board and its questionable ability to properly regulate the impact of the new casino and other ventures on gambling addiction and criminal activity.

"When the people regulating gambling see an operator who has been suspected of money laundering, wildlife trafficking, and ties to drug trafficking for the Mexican cartels as acceptable, it demonstrates even further why the citizens of Chicago can't trust the Lightfoot administration's claims that the casino regulatory approval process will protect our communities." said Stop Predatory Gambling Illinois organizer and Chicago resident Zach Savella Stallard.

The full letter to the Illinois Gambling Board can be read here:

<https://www.stoppredatorygambling.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/2022-Caliente-letter-to-IGB.pdf>

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