

Statement on Casino Gambling Bill

March 14, 1989

The Catholic Bishops of Ohio adopted the following statement regarding H.B. 128 at their regularly scheduled quarterly meeting on March 13, 1989.

There has been significant public discussion about proposed plans to build a \$300 million dollar resort complex in Lorain, Ohio. The main feature of the proposed plan has been a casino that is envisioned as the centerpiece of the proposal. Just what effect the resort in general and the casino in particular will have on Lorain and other Ohio communities has become a complicated controversial question.

The Catholic Conference of Ohio has been asked to offer its view of the proposed resort and casino complex. The Conference responds because not only the material and social, but also the moral and spiritual welfare of Lorain and other Ohio communities is likely to be affected by this project. It is with total community welfare in mind that the Catholic Conference of Ohio offers the following observations:

The Ohio Revised Code distinguishes between gambling for profit and charitable schemes or games of chance. With few exceptions states have recognized that large and professionally run casino gambling does not promote the best interests of society. Experience indicates a variety of social ills are associated with such gambling. These include a tendency to promote addictive gambling, familial irresponsibility, alcohol and/or drug abuse, and perhaps organized crime. As a result of these and other concerns, casino gambling is not legally permitted in the majority of states. The question under consideration is whether H.B. 128 ought to be approved to pave the way for the proposed casino in Lorain.

Certain "schemes" and "games" of chance are permitted under current Ohio law. In conformity with Ohio law, schemes of chance are operated by educational, charitable and religious organizations as well as by veterans, fraternal, service groups, etc.

The State recognizes that these schemes of chance are generally not dangerous as far as public welfare is concerned. Such activity takes place in our parish centers and schools in the State. The Catholic Conference does, indeed, recognize that a variety of ills can become associated even with these schemes of chance, and for these and other reasons, administrators of Catholic institutions have been urged to seek alternate forms of fund raising.

Within the Catholic Church's moral tradition there is not an absolute prohibition of gambling in all forms. In other words, schemes and games of chance need not be judged evil in themselves. A judgement about the rightness or wrongness of schemes and games of chance depends upon a complicated variety of factors. Therefore, Catholics are strongly encouraged to investigate the details of the proposed casino in Lorain and judge for themselves whether or not the casino proposal is in the best interest of Lorain and other Ohio communities. Such judgement should include not only economic, but also moral and spiritual considerations.

The Catholic Conference of Ohio recognizes that many Catholics will look to the Church for moral guidance regarding the establishment of a casino in the Lorain community. In response to those who seek such direction, the Catholic Conference of Ohio opposes any change in Ohio law that would pave the way for the establishment of casino gambling in Lorain.