

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

Opposition Statement on Issue 3: Learn and Earn Constitutional Amendment Regarding Casino and Slot Machine Gambling

OCTOBER 3, 2006

On November 7, 2006 voters will be asked to amend the Constitution of the State to authorize the establishment of casino and slot machine gambling. This amendment, State Issue 3, permits up to 31,500 slot machines at seven horse racing tracks and two Cleveland non-track locations. It will also permit, if approved by the county's voters, expanded gaming in the two racetrack and two non-racetrack locations in Cuyahoga County. 55% of the revenues raised from this amendment are to be distributed to the slot and casino owners and operators, 30% to the Board of Regents for college scholarships and administration of the program. The remaining revenues are to be divided among local governments, racetracks for purse money and gambling addiction services.

Many persons have asked how the Catholic Church views gambling in general, and State Issue 3 in particular. In response to those who have asked, we offer the following:

Games and schemes of chance are not in themselves inherently wrong. The Church recognizes, however, that a variety of social ills can become associated with any form of gambling. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* "they become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others. The passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement" (2413).

Because of the many concerns associated with gambling, we encourage you to study this proposed constitutional amendment to determine whether such gambling facilities are in the best interest of the citizens of this state. Such determination should include both moral and economic considerations. Here are some questions that you might ask yourself as you think about how to vote on this constitutional amendment:

- ◆ Is Issue 3 needed, and will it help persons, businesses, social institutions and families?
- ◆ Is Issue 3 well conceived, well drafted and appropriate for inclusion in the state Constitution?
- ◆ Will passage of Issue 3 entice significant numbers of individuals to consistently gamble away more than they can afford to lose?
- ◆ As a result of Issue 3, will communities and educational facilities develop an unhealthy dependency on tax revenues from for-profit casino and slot machine gambling?
- ◆ As a result of Issue 3, will communities be able to properly monitor and regulate casino and slot machine gambling so as to minimize criminal and immoral behavior?
- ◆ Will the widespread availability of casino and slot machine gambling result in an increase of social ills such as addictive gambling, substance abuse, and crime?
- ◆ Will the specific operational provisions authorized by State Issue 3 assure fair competition, appropriate state oversight, and meaningful citizen participation?
- ◆ Do the potential benefits of Issue 3 outweigh the potential burdens?

[MORE]

Opposition Statement regarding Issue 3: Gambling (continued)

As Catholic Bishops, we conclude that passage of Issue 3 would not be in the best moral, social and economic interest of the citizens of our state. Experience indicates that a variety of social ills are associated with casino and slot machine gambling. These include a tendency to promote addictive gambling, familial irresponsibility, alcohol and/or substance abuse, and organized crime. Slot machines have been called the “crack cocaine” of gambling, referring to the addictive nature of the machines on gamblers and the quickness by which bettors can lose large amounts of money. Studies have indicated that the problems of gambling addiction double when casinos are placed within 50 miles of the gambler.

We also question whether this proposal is well conceived and well drafted. Recent studies have questioned the economic projections and the reliability of funds within the proposed scholarship program. In addition, we do not feel that it is in the best interest of Ohioans to grant a *constitutionally protected monopoly* to a limited number of casino and racetrack owners. Voters should carefully consider proposals that seek to amend the Constitution with very detailed provisions.

In stating our opposition to casino gambling initiatives, we are often questioned about our Church’s involvement in charitable bingo. It is a fact that many of our institutions rely upon this form of fundraising. We would prefer, and in fact have encouraged, our institutions to raise needed funds through alternate forms of fundraising because there are a variety of social ills that can also become associated with charitable bingo.

At the same time, however, charitable bingo benefits the community and involves community members in ways distinct from casino gambling. Bingo games in Ohio use 100% of the net proceeds for charitable purposes. These charities are churches, schools, fraternal groups, youth athletic programs, volunteer fire departments, senior citizen clubs, neighborhood organizations, and various service programs. Thousands of volunteers donate their time to staff such games. Communities have been generally supportive of this form of “lower stakes” charitable fundraising.

Casino and slot machine gambling is something different. **We believe that passage of Issue 3 would not be in the long-term best interest of our state.**



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