

Statement on the Establishment of Riverboat Casino Gambling in Ohio

September 16, 1996

On November 5, voters will be asked to amend the Constitution of the State to authorize the establishment of Riverboat Casino Gambling. This amendment, State Issue 1, calls for the creation of up to eight permanently-moored boats to conduct games and schemes of chance without wagering limits. Two of these boats would be located in the city of Cincinnati, one in Hamilton County outside of Cincinnati, three in the city of Cleveland, one in the city of Lorain and one in Mahoning County.

Many persons have asked how the Catholic Church views gambling in general, and State Issue 1 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 casinos 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:

Will passage of Issue 1 entice significant numbers of individuals to consistently gamble away more than they can afford to lose?

Will passage of Issue 1 aggravate human weaknesses of greed, materialism, and compulsive behaviors?

As a result of Issue 1, will communities develop an unhealthy dependency on tax revenues from for-profit casino gambling?

As a result of Issue 1, will communities be able to properly monitor and regulate casino gambling so as to minimize criminal and immoral behavior?

Will the widespread availability of casino gambling due to passage of Issue 1 result in an increase of social ills such as addictive gambling, substance abuse, and crime?

Will the specific operational provisions authorized by State Issue 1 assure fair competition, appropriate state oversight, and meaningful citizen participation?

As Catholic Bishops, we conclude that passage of Issue 1 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 gambling. These include a tendency to promote addictive gambling, familial irresponsibility, alcohol and/or substance abuse, and organized crime. In addition, several specific provisions contained in Issue 1 appear overly protective of riverboat casinos. One would require the state legislature to develop and maintain a casino industry “competitive with gaming in other areas of the country”.

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. Throughout Ohio, charitable bingo conducted by our schools and churches raised over \$43-million in 1995. 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 which 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 gambling is something different. We believe that allowing casino gambling in Ohio would not be in the long-term best interest of our state.