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A Catholic Perspective on Expanded Gambling in Connecticut

During this 2017 Session of the Connecticut General Assembly, the Public Safety and Security Committee will be addressing the issue of gaming and gambling as they consider the question of permitting a third casino in Connecticut. Since gaming and gambling are once again being discussed within the legislative process, we, the Catholic Bishops of Connecticut, wish to be of service to our Catholic communities and the wider public by contributing to this debate and offering a perspective based on the wisdom of our tradition.

The belief of the Catholic Church is that “games of chance (card games, etc.) or wagers are not in themselves contrary to justice. They become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and the needs of others.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2413).

Gambling as such is not immoral. Purchasing a lottery ticket or placing a wager on a horse is not an immoral act. Even churches, schools and other non-profit entities raise money through raffles or games of chance. However, when individuals are drawn into gambling in an excessive or even compulsive way so as to compromise or even ruin their ability “to provide for themselves or the needs of others,” then gambling becomes morally objectionable as being contrary to the good of individuals and society.

People of goodwill may disagree on exactly when and where these conditions cross this threshold. However, the serious negative impact of gambling in Connecticut is already well documented, and has prompted more and more people to question the circumstances surrounding gaming in our State.

In 2009, a study commissioned by the Connecticut Division of Special Revenue on the economic and social impact of Indian casinos in the State found that while the casinos did boost employment and revenues, they also resulted in numerous and serious negative consequences for individuals and for locales near casinos. These include a 400 percent increase in embezzlement arrests, a doubling of DUI arrests, and an increase in substandard and illegal housing for undocumented workers. Of the problem gamblers studied in the report, 62 percent gambled until their last dollar was gone. Personal bankruptcies in areas where the State’s two Indian casinos are located were more than 10 percent higher than the national norm in 7 of the 10 years after the casinos were built.

We are mindful that the expansion of casinos in Connecticut would be a potential source of new revenue, but revenues are not the sole criterion of the common good. It is the responsibility of government and of the voting public to consider all the consequences, both positive and negative, for individuals, families and communities. This matter is simply too grave not to consider every aspect of this legislation.

In light of the studies that have been done, and the negative consequences that can result in a society already burdened by so many social problems, we are strongly opposed to the expansion of casino gambling in Connecticut.

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