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Dear Senator,

I am writing on behalf of the four Roman Catholic bishops of Kentucky who are pastors to more than 400,000 Catholics living in every corner of the Commonwealth.

We are deeply concerned about the well-being of all Kentuckians, but are especially concerned about the more than 800,000 Kentuckians who live in poverty. Our parishes, schools, Catholic Charities agencies, St. Vincent de Paul Societies and other organizations give aid to many of these persons almost daily. Finding ways to address the needs of this particularly vulnerable population is challenging.

One proposal is Senate Bill 151, a well-intentioned offer to change our Constitution and allow expanded gambling to increase Kentucky's revenue. **We strongly OPPOSE this proposal** because Kentucky should not tie itself to an unreliable, regressive revenue stream and because professional gambling will have a profoundly harmful effect on many of those persons we serve who live in poverty.

The Catholic Church teaches that gambling is a morally neutral act. Games of chance "are not in themselves contrary to justice" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2413). However, the Catechism also warns that "the passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement" and becomes morally unacceptable when it deprives an individual of what is necessary to provide for his/her needs and those of others.

When gambling as a revenue stream becomes overly prevalent in a society - Kentucky already allows horse racing and a state lottery - the risks associated with problem gambling multiply. With their flashing lights, free-flowing alcoholic drinks, all-night hours and generally intoxicating atmosphere, casinos are more likely than other gambling options to lead to bad decisions and catastrophic losses for patrons, particularly those prone to problem or compulsive gambling.

In 2008 the University of Kentucky's Survey Research Center found that Kentucky's overall prevalence rate of lifetime compulsive gamblers is 0.3 percent of all adult Kentuckians. The overall prevalence rate of lifetime problem gamblers is 1.7 percent. The overall prevalence rate of lifetime at-risk gamblers is 6.2 percent. Based on this research, it is estimated that there are nearly 190,000 at-risk gamblers, more than 50,000 problem gamblers, and more than 9,000 compulsive gamblers.

Data from the 2008 survey indicates, among gamblers, that the following groups are at relatively higher risk to have some manifestation of problem or compulsive gambling:

- males
- young adults 18-24 years of age
- Blacks and other racial minorities
- those who have never married
- those who have been divorced or who are separated
- employed adults
- individuals residing in households with incomes of \$25,000 or less.

Senate Bill 151 is not a dream, but a nightmare that is regressive in nature as a revenue source, preying on needy individuals especially vulnerable to the lure of the casino and the promise of great fortune. For those who are

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struggling to make ends meet, casino gambling can provide an attractive means to relieve financial burdens, which ultimately only leads to crushing debt and personal crisis.

Some people wonder whether we are consistent when we tolerate church-based games of chance. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* helps us to highlight the difference: "Games of chance (card games, etc.) or wagers are not themselves contrary to justice. They become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others. The passion of gambling risks becoming an enslavement . . ." Thus, recreational games of chance which provide social entertainment as well as fund-raising for charitable and educational purposes are morally acceptable when practiced in moderation.

Bingos, church festival raffles, and the other charitable gambling events of all those holding charitable gambling licenses grossed just over \$406 million for the 2010 calendar year. After paying out prizes and operating expenses there was nearly \$45 million available for the charitable work of the licensees. And the hard work that went into producing this outcome was all performed by volunteers. The Kentucky Department of Charitable Gaming received slightly over \$3 million from the licensees to ensure the integrity and accountability of those engaged in charitable gambling.

We would prefer to find more stable means to support our schools and other charitable endeavors. Even with the revenue produced by our charitable gambling licensees we still find ourselves closing schools, consolidating parishes, and having less funding to provide for those with financial needs.

An article published February 17 in the Lexington Herald-Leader about Governor Beshear's weekly Internet chat reported that the Governor "touted gambling as a way to generate additional money for the state budget by allowing casinos to open and then taxing their revenue."

Apparently Governor Beshear did not read the attached article published January 16 in the Lexington Herald-Leader - *Casinos no cure-all for state budgets, economists say* - reporting on the experience of other states and the failure of professional gambling to provide the revenue necessary to meet the needs in those states. The newspaper found that in two dozen states with casino revenue "[a]ll of them cut spending; half raised taxes. Some fired thousands of their public workers, including educators and police, and gutted their basic classroom funding."

Any number of studies point to the harmful effects that result in expanding the opportunities to gamble, especially among low-income persons and those who suffer from gambling addiction. A 2009 study in Connecticut found an increase in employment and revenues, but also a 400 percent increase in embezzlement arrests, a doubling of driving while intoxicated arrests, and an increase in personal bankruptcies in areas where the state's two Indian casinos are located. The data is clear that proximity to casinos in general and predatory slot machines in particular increases addiction rates, and casinos derive at least 60% of their revenues from problem gamblers.

When looking at potential sources for new revenue, it is the responsibility of government to consider the consequences. Expansion of gambling will be devastating to individuals and families.

We cannot improve the conditions of our low-income sisters and brothers by throwing away some of them to lives of addiction to predatory gambling. The Catholic Conference of Kentucky continues to support the resolution of the Kentucky Council of Churches in which it states the following:

For the Christian, the common good, therefore, must be established by just and honest means. In a democratic society, government must persuade its citizens to support with their taxes the programs the citizens believe will be instrumental in nurturing and protecting all members of society and efficacious for productive economy and just relations among all residents of that political entity.

We very much appreciate your willingness to serve in our legislature and know you face difficult decisions. This is one of those decisions and we urge you to resist the temptation to do the easy thing and vote to put SB 151 on the ballot in November. **Vote NO on SB 151.**

Sincerely

Rev. Patrick Delahanty
Executive Director