



**STATEMENT IN OPPOSITION TO
VIDEO LOTTERY TERMINAL LEGISLATION
*Senate Bills 3 and 4 / House Bill 3 and 4***

**to the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee and the
House Ways and Means Committee
on Friday, November 2, 2007**

***Submitted by Julie Varner
Associate Director, Social Concerns***

The Maryland Catholic Conference represents the public policy interests of the Catholic bishops serving Maryland's three (arch)dioceses. The Conference testifies today in opposition to legislation that would enable slot machines to be introduced to the State of Maryland.

Moral Analysis – Traditional Catholic theology affirms that gambling is not intrinsically evil or immoral, but that it can become morally wrong when it interferes with one's other duties or responsibilities. Observing that "[t]he passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement," the *Catechism* accentuates the need for moderation to avoid addictions and unhealthy behaviors. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2413)

If properly controlled, gambling can provide legitimate recreation for those who participate responsibly-- whether it takes the form of a community raffle or bingo event, a lottery ticket, racetrack betting, or a casino game. However, those prone to excessive or irresponsible gambling place themselves, and often others, at considerable risk of financial and emotional harm in "no limits" environments such as casinos. That same danger is greatly reduced, and in some cases eliminated, in settings that have strict limits on prizes, frequency of gaming opportunities, and spending.

Individuals who engage in gaming activity are obliged to make conscientious decisions about their involvement and to set prudent limits. The duty to establish

appropriate boundaries also applies to governments that sponsor various forms of gambling, those who operate gaming businesses, and organizations that run raffles and bingo nights. No appeal to revenue shortages or fund-raising opportunities can diminish the responsibility to protect people from the risks that sometimes accompany games of chance.

Social Considerations – Although personal morality and responsibility provide a useful starting point for an examination of gambling initiatives, God’s call to love our neighbors as ourselves means we must also evaluate the likely impact of bringing a more widespread “culture of gambling” to Maryland communities. We must ask: Is gambling revenue an investment in the common good of our state?

Communities with strong families, successful businesses, and vibrant social structures have a considerable stake in the outcome of our state’s slots debate. In states that have already opened their borders to profit-driven gambling industries, many people who did not participate in games of chance helplessly watched the breakdown of their own neighborhoods as crime rates grew and small businesses – once the community lifeline – were forced to close when regular patrons migrated to casinos. Such individuals are the victims of a social and economic policy they did not choose. And for some who do participate in games of chance, gambling is an addiction. In environments that impose no limits on wagers, compulsive gambling has led to broken families, lost jobs, and even suicides.

To a large degree, the disastrous social consequences that can accompany gambling are borne by people already experiencing financial hardship. In comparison to people with higher incomes, a higher percentage of low-income persons gamble, and they spend higher portions of their incomes on gambling than more affluent people. In fact, spending on our state’s lottery games is disproportionately high in poor neighborhoods. The public interest, we believe, is better served when all citizens shoulder responsibility for funding needed programs than when a government depends on individuals who gamble – many of whom are likely to be the people most in need of the services requiring additional revenue.

Heavy reliance on gambling revenue might also make it difficult to plan state expenditures from year to year. Like any other business, the casino industry is subject to fluctuations in the economy and the ever-changing interests of consumers. Maryland cannot afford to wager the fiscal viability of state programs – many of which serve its poorest and most vulnerable residents – on games of chance.

The Conference urges an unfavorable report on the referenced legislation and thanks this committee for its consideration.