

Missouri Clergy Against Gambling Expansion

Public Statement of Missouri Religious Leaders Regarding the Negative Impact of State-Sponsored Gambling

As leaders of congregations across Missouri, we assemble to express our objection to the current legislative position which continually expands our state's dependence on legalized gambling, and brings great harm to many families in our state. In our judgment, such a course is profoundly unwise as public policy, and morally indefensible in its implication of state encouragement for citizens to divert personal income, often needed for basic family support, in the hope of long-odds windfall gains.

No significant studies on the cost of gambling in Missouri have been undertaken as recommended by the U.S. Gambling Impact Study Commission's findings (1999). Instead, we make public policy decisions based only on the revenue flowing to the state and local government units. Absent from consideration are the losses to other businesses, the drain of Missouri money to out-of-state casino owners, the financial devastation which results from uncontrolled addictive gambling, the lost time and productivity of Missouri workers and the thousands of Missouri youth being drawn into compulsive gambling habits. Multiple studies from other states, from economists and from social scientists conclude that such costs in fact exceed the highly touted revenue.

In addition to measurable indicators, great stress and pain for individuals and families result over and over again in marital tension, career destruction, bankruptcy and all manner of personal disintegration and tragedy. As religious leaders, we know these stories all too well.

For 172 years, Missouri survived periods of economic difficulty and prospered in times of economic gain without recourse to legalized gambling. For the past 13 years, we have been abandoning this strong tradition, first with the promise of highly regulated riverboat casinos that would only operate on two-hour cruises and now with virtually land-based casinos. It is not worthy of our state to attempt to address its public financial strains by enticing its citizens to increase their personal financial risks.

We respectfully charge those in Missouri government to carefully revisit our state's motto: "The welfare of the people shall be the supreme law," while providing new legislation that will lessen the negative impact of gambling on the citizens of our state. We fully endorse Missouri's wise \$500 loss limit law in casinos as a safeguard to families and society as a whole, and oppose any effort to remove it.