

Committee on Economic Justice of the Erie District  
Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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I have asked to speak before the committee today (Thursday, September 12, 1996), as the chairperson of the Economic Justice Committee of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

There are 24 congregations of our synod within Erie County, and while we do not speak for each individual, our denomination is the second largest in the area.

As a church, we have been on record as being opposed to the further extension of gambling within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Aside from any question of morals, with which the state does not necessarily agree, as citizens who are concerned with the care of our citizens, it seems that gambling, especially when it has the approval of the state, gives the wrong impression to many of the most impressionable and vulnerable individuals within our society.

Much as we are hearing about the advertising for the sale of cigarettes, the target for government promotion of gambling is aimed toward the most vulnerable – both the young and the addictive; and especially toward those who are least able to afford the constant loss of dollars that gambling brings to people.

As many of the communities of our nation have shown, the social consequences that follow the introduction of gambling into a community far outweigh the benefits that might be received. These include the cost of regulation, increased crime from those who seek to cover their losses, increased need for police protection, the influence that the great amounts of money available from the gambling interests have upon our political system, and the further infiltration of organized crime into the community.

Gambling addiction causes most of the same problems within the family and community that are caused by alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes. The major difference is the great cost that this “habit” can bring to families that cannot afford the great losses that compulsive gamblers cause.

While we realize that gambling will never be stopped by legislation, it is unfortunate when government support is given through legislative approval.

We would ask that you allow any legislation dealing with legalized gambling – and at the moment – riverboat gambling, be allowed to die in committee.