

TESTIMONY OF MRS. LAURIE LeSUER

Good afternoon. My name is Laurie LeSuer. My husband and I are ten-year residents of a neighborhood in downtown Erie, within walking distance of our children's schools, my husband's office, our church, and the proposed sites of the riverboat casinos. I am here today because I am very strongly opposed to legalized gambling. We are committed to this community, as are our neighbors; they share our concerns about the effects of legalized gambling. Let me start by commenting on some of the most obvious issues involved.

ECONOMICS. There's no question that there is a lot of money to be made in legalized gambling, and that some of that money could benefit our state and local governments. However, we would be fools not to recognize that the vast majority of any profits would leave Pennsylvania. Face it: the gaming corporations are in business to make money. They don't care about Erie, they only promise us a piece of the pie in order to pull in big money for themselves. The Jumer Hotel fiasco has already vividly demonstrated the extent to which casino owners are willing to abandon clear commitments to the community at their own whim. From the beginning of time, people have always been attracted to a promise of a "quick buck;" legalized gambling, and its so-called "benefits to the community," are just the latest community get-rich-quick scheme.

SOCIAL ISSUES. If gambling is legalized, Erie will not be the only place in the region for this form of "entertainment." The money required to keep the casinos afloat will have to come from somewhere. If there are casinos in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, other places in Pennsylvania, and potentially Cleveland, Buffalo, and a short ferry ride to Canada, how many tourists will *Erie* actually attract? If the numbers don't come from outside the Erie area, they must come from within; how far will the gaming establishments need to go to draw local residents? I've seen casino advertisements on billboards near Joliet, Illinois, promoting early bird drink specials beginning at six o'clock in the morning. This is decidedly *not* the culture in which I desire to live and raise my children.

CRIME, PROPERTY VALUES. If people become addicted to gambling, and all sides agree there will be a percentage of the population that does, how will that addiction be manifested? We all know that there are more losers than winners in this game (otherwise there are no profits); statistics show that the losers will leave in their wake broken families, unpaid bills, loss of employment, and many will turn to crime to feed their habit. Whether the result is increased begging on the street, petty crimes, or more serious criminal activity, it would negatively impact our quality of life and decrease our property values as residents gain yet another reason to flee the city. Approximately once per year we get someone coming to our door with an elaborate story about why they need cash, and need it now. A robbery spree last summer had some neighbors considering a move to the suburbs; what would increased solicitations do?

QUALITY OF LIFE. My husband and I are both transplants to Erie from larger cities. As "outsiders," we were attracted by the unique values we found displayed at the heart of the Erie community: the willing and substantial volunteer efforts; the strong ethnic and religious community celebrations; the feeling that this is not just where we live, this is our neighborhood, the place in which our lives are lived in community with others. I left my career as a research chemist to concentrate on raising our three children, creating a home, and becoming involved in our church and our community. We live in an older home, which we are restoring. We see this as evidence of our commitment to our neighborhood and downtown Erie. During the past few years, we have seen many others making similar, substantial commitments, and taking pride in the

neighborhood. The prospect of legalized gambling within a mile of our homes is not compatible with this picture, nor is it likely to attract others to make the downtown area their home. It points to a different Erie than the one we invested in ten years ago and have grown to love.

BASIC MORALITY OF GAMBLING. The quality of life issues I've discussed are very important to me. But they're *not* the reason I'm here today. I'm here today because of an issue nobody wants to address head-on in this politically-correct day and age. Regardless of the *results* of gambling (pro or con) for the community, is gambling itself a morally legitimate option? Is it really, as its promoters would have us believe, just a benign amusement that has no moral significance in and of itself? Or is it essentially a practice that is based on greed, undermining values that our government should be promoting, such as a legitimate work ethic based on productivity? Does it not, again, offer false illusions that participants can "get rich quick," when in reality the vast majority will "get poor quick"?

Compounding these moral failings, gambling is a parasite that feeds on the poorest segment of our society, those who are most unable to resist its wiles and in the worst position to rebound from its economic consequences. If ever we were alarmed at the prospect of the rich getting richer while the poor get poorer, we should be both appalled and ashamed of our easy attraction to the false promises of the gambling industry. Never was there a clearer example of a public moral issue where the *only* responsible and legitimate response is to "Just say no!"

How many lives destroyed by gambling addiction are too many? Do we want to be dependant on the money gleaned from the poorest of our population, those least able to afford it? Do we want Erie to be known as a casino town? Is this really the image we want to promote, and the basis we want for our economy? What would we be teaching our children by promoting such a vice? Isn't it important to us to feel safe walking in downtown Erie, especially by our new library?

There is a preponderance of relativism in our society today; "Well, it's not for me but I can't tell other people what to do." We're afraid to say that the gambling industry is driven by, and fostered by, greed; the love of money IS the root of all evil and this is the epitome of that evil. We are blinded by the promise of dollars and fail to realize that there are non-economic considerations.

As the candidates for public office strive to be the ones most concerned about family values, how is it that we are considering legislation that would encourage immorality? As humans we constantly fight against falling into sin, and now our government wants to tempt us further. It's time for us to draw the line. Erie is a wonderful place to live, work, and raise our children. I believe it should be a priority to keep it that way.

Should you wish to gamble on something, how about gambling on letting this so-called "opportunity" pass? I'm confident that, as we watch other communities deal with the effects of increased legalized gambling, we'll consider ourselves the winners.

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LJ LeSuer