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LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

Oral Remarks of Edward F. Saunders Jr., Esquire
Before the Senate Committee on Ways and Means Relative to
Proposed Legislation to Expand Gambling

June 8, 2010

For the record my name is Edward F. Saunders Jr. I am the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Catholic Conference. The Conference is the public policy office of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth, representing the Archdiocese of Boston and the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield and Worcester.

The Roman Catholic Church recognizes that gambling can be a legitimate form of recreation. However it can be accompanied by a “passion that risks becoming an enslavement.” The Church considers gambling “morally unacceptable” when it “deprives someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others.”

The Roman Catholic Bishops in Massachusetts have opposed the expansion of gambling in the Commonwealth because “in gambling, especially in casinos and high stake lotteries, there are increased dangers and abuses that warrant vigilance and concern.” There is no doubt that gambling can victimize the poor and often surpass “legitimate recreation” to a level of addiction.

The Conference respectfully submits that the “human costs” of expanded gambling have not been adequately considered or adequately addressed in any proposed legislation authorizing expanded gambling. The questions of – will the benefits of expanded gambling outweigh its costs? - will expanded gambling harm the very citizens it is intended to help? - will expanded gambling raise crime rates? – have not been fully answered let alone fully discussed.

While there has been some acknowledgement that there will be increased drug and alcohol abuse, increased personal bankruptcies, increased domestic violence and increased hardships for individuals and families, it appears that these social problems associated with expanded gambling are being accepted as a “cost of doing business.”

What is not being acknowledged is that the harm will reach far beyond individual gamblers by affecting their spouses, their children, dependents, employers and the community in which they live.

Government should promote the common good with the best interest of all citizens in mind. The Conference respectfully submits it is not “good economic policy” to attempt to increase the Commonwealth’s income by authorizing expanded gambling at a cost that involves the personal well being of its citizens.