

February 9, 2022

Re: Open letter from 91 Ohio clergy on House Bill 29 and predatory sports gambling

Dear Governor Mike DeWine,

Super Bowl Sunday is one of the biggest betting events in the world. However, it is important to consider the public health impact of problem-gambling during this time. Some of the twenty-two million Americans who will wager \$6 billion dollars on the Super Bowl are in the desperate grip of a severe gambling problem. (1) According to a survey conducted in 2016-2017, .9% of all adult Ohioans have a compulsive problem-gambling addiction, equating to 76,379 individuals in a population of 8.98 million Ohioans. (2)

Problem gambling can be associated with crime, domestic violence, bankruptcy, depression, and suicide. One example of a compulsive gambler is former Ohio State star quarterback Art Schlichter, who was banned from the NFL for his sports betting addiction. Debts, con schemes, and fake checks connected to his gambling losses have kept the divorced Schlichter in and out of prison since 1995. (3) We should heed the Bible when it says, "He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live." (Proverbs 15:27)

Despite the harmful risks associated with sports gambling, it is our understanding that after the Ohio Senate voted 31-1 in favor of House Bill 29, and the Ohio House 72-23, you signed House Bill 29 into law on December 22, 2021, legalizing predatory sports gambling in the state. As leading clergymen representing ninety-one (91) congregations across North Central Ohio, we believe the decision you made to sign House Bill 29 into law was irresponsible and showed a glaring lack of leadership.

House Bill 29 will allow predatory sports betting on collegiate and professional sports. It will also legalize sports betting at brick-and-mortar casinos, stadiums, bars, and restaurants and allow betting via internet, mobile devices, and kiosks. The Ohio Casino Control Commission will have regulatory oversight.

As the state government under your leadership continues to employ new methods of consumer fraud to exploit Ohio's poor, it bears worth repeating that gambling does not create new wealth, gambling only makes wealth change hands. This past year Ohioans lost over \$2.11 billion from casinos, racinos and bingo halls. (4) We are told by the Bible "not to rob the poor because he is poor, nor oppress the afflicted at the gate; for the LORD will plead their cause and plunder the soul of those who plunder them." (Proverbs 22:22-23)

As clergy on the frontlines ministering to broken lives, we must deal with reckless policy decisions made at the Statehouse, and that is why we are compelled to plead for the cause of the poor and afflicted. Besides causing the escalation of problem-gambling cases, state-sanctioned sports gambling will also harm the integrity of sports institutions it wagers on.

Unfortunately, Ohio is well acquainted with game-fixing, point-shaving, and unsanctioned gambling in its sports teams, House Bill 29 will only exacerbate the problem. Whether it is Pete Rose regularly placing wagers on his team as Manager of the Cincinnati Reds, or University of Toledo football and basketball players accepting financial gifts to alter their game performances, with the state government sanctioning sports gambling, more such incidents will undoubtedly occur. (5) Players will be tempted to cheat and the faith in the integrity of the games will be diminished. Everyone will lose.

According to the Bible, "Wealth obtained dishonestly will diminish." (Proverbs 13:11)

In closing, as clergymen in North Central Ohio, we believe eternal principles should not be abandoned for temporary profit. The faith community in our region has a history of opposing the exploitation of the poor and afflicted, (6-11) most notably when in 2008 clergy representing eighty-two local congregations held a press conference opposing state casinos. (12-14) House Bill 29 and gambling in general brings out the worst in people and involves the corruption of human institutions, including government.

We do not forget the corruption associated with the Ohio Lottery Commission. It was in Mansfield, Ohio in 2009 where the Ohio Lottery Director gave 100 promotional instant lottery tickets to an Ohio State trooper two days after he was issued a verbal warning for two traffic violations. (15) This was a form of bribery which perverts justice and blinds those who see. Regrettably, this immoral behavior will be normalized with House Bill 29 as law and the poor and afflicted will continue to be skillfully deceived by those addicted to power.

Matthew 7: 17-20 says “Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”

For what it is worth, state-sanctioned sports betting will set up a banana republic rotten to its core and will be a bad bet for Ohio.

The following list of leading clergymen representing (91) ninety-one congregations across North Central Ohio are cosigners of this open letter objecting to House Bill 29 which allows the expansion of predatory gambling and the legalization of sports gambling:

Bishop Anthony Cooper, Shelby Life Church	Pastor David Bates, Galion Unity Freewill Baptist
Pastor Bruce Philippi, Journey Life Center	Pastor Clint Zeigler, Sovereign Christ Church
Pastor Dan Baer, Mansfield Gospel Assembly	Pastor David Rentzel, Ontario Abundant Life Tabernacle
Pastor Doug Tackett, Taylortown Community	Pastor Hank Webb, Belmont Community Church
Pastor Christopher Replogle, Calvary Baptist	Pastor Christopher Thomas, Diamond Hills Baptist
Pastor Scott Maglott, Lexington Nazarene	Pastor George Lewis, Shelby Temple of GOD
Pastor Matthew Pond, Shelby First Freewill Baptist	Pastor Chad Hayes, Mansfield Caesarea Baptist
Rabbi William Hallbrook, Sar Shalom Center	Pastor Rob Ratcliff, North Woodbury Freewill Baptist
Pastor Matthew Potosky, Albion Brethren	Pastor Dallas Waggle, Lucas Foursquare
Reverend El Akuchie, Godsfield House of Prayer	Pastor Faron Cole, Eastern Road Church of GOD
Pastor Art Kennard, Maranatha Christian Ctr.	Pastor Chad Berry, Lexington New Liberty Baptist
Pastor Steven Conn, Bethel Freewill Baptist	Pastor Bryan Schatzinger, Calvary Chapel Mansfield
Pastor Mark Meyer, Gracepoint Sanctuary	Pastor Russell Stanford, All Believers in Christ
Pastor Dink Porter, Mansfield Open Bible	Pastor Mark Dettmer, Pleasant Grove Community
Pastor James Marshall, Ganges Community	Pastor Russ Smith, Shiloh Wesley Evangelical
Pastor Mike Rose, Hope on the Hill Church	Pastor John Temple, Loudonville Trinity Community
Pastor Chris Spencer, Crestline Grace Baptist	Pastor Layton Broome, Paradise Hill United Methodist
Pastor David Guild, Mansfield Foursquare	Pastor David Mahon, Galion Apostolic Assembly
Pastor Aaron Boggs, Fredericktown Freewill Baptist	Pastor J.C. Church, Bucyrus Victory in Truth Ministries
Pastor Steve Baldrige, Rome Community	Pastor Les-Grace Farley, Lexington Irresistible Church
Pastor Rick Lewis, Shelby Church of GOD	Pastor Rich Rader, Journey Harbor
Pastor Brian Phillips, New Beginnings Freewill	Pastor Randy Raynes, Mansfield Fellowship Baptist
Pastor Robert O’Brian, Apostolic Faith Assembly	Pastor Ron Smals, Woodville Grace Brethren
Pastor Steve Brenneman, Awakening Christian Ctr.	Pastor David Parsons, Zion’s Refuge Baptist
Pastor Clarence Sanderfer, New Life Baptist	Pastor Jerry O’Brien, Faith Harvest Fellowship
Pastor Patrick Bailey, North Bend Church of Brethren	Elder James DeWeese, Mansfield Providence Church

Pastor Brad Gentile, Shelby First Baptist
Pastor Rick Wiseman, Promised Land Fellowship
Pastor Ferlie Yates, Hanna Road Church of GOD
Pastor Paul Matthewson, Maranatha Bible Baptist
Pastor Ed Colegrove, Edison Enterprise Baptist
Pastor John Bouquet, Savannah Bethel Baptist
Pastor Eric Byrom, Mansfield Grace Fellowship
Pastor Les Vnasdale, Cornerstone Grace Brethren
Pastor Lucian Baker, Christ the King Community
Pastor Ben Gregg, Plymouth Church of GOD
Pastor Aaron Rose, Madison Fusion Church
Pastor Paul Lintern, Oakland Lutheran Church
Pastor Paul Lintern, Southside Christian Church
Pastor Bill Fox, Crestline Faith Community Church
Pastor Louis Blevins, Mansfield Latter Rain Church
Pastor Sheldon Mencer, Mission 3:16 Church
Pastor Joe Nichols, ARC Empowerment Center
Pastor Nickolas Kelly, North Liberty Community
Pastor Steve Schag, Shelby Calvary Baptist
Pastor Robert Kurtz, Mansfield Temple Baptist

Pastor Ray Seldon, Ontario First Wesleyan
Pastor David Ferrell, Mansfield Holiness Chapel
Pastor Clyde Kerby, Ministries of Hope & Healing
Pastor Kevin Evans, Ganges Liberty Baptist
Pastor Floyd Allen, Philippian Community Church
Pastor James Spencer, Mansfield People's Baptist
Pastor Eddie Massey, Mount Vernon Apostolic Faith
Rabbi Bob Bauer, Crestline Beit El Elyon
Bishop Sylvester Ginn, Hesed Agape Fellowship
Pastor Joe Smith, Ontario Westside Baptist
Pastor James Hill, Mansfield Paradise Church
Pastor Mark Wireman, Shiloh Pentecostal
Pastor Rich Hurles, Plymouth LifePoint Church
Pastor William Strader, First Christian Missionary Alliance
Pastor James Mitchell, New Liberty Baptist
Pastor Matt Smith, Love Action Church
Pastor Rick Maddox, Galion Alliance Church
Pastor Dana Gammill, Cathedral of Life
Pastor Joe Maggelet, Ashland Fellowship of Christian Athl

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- (3) "The Most Notorious Sports Betting Scandals Of All Time," by Gary Rotstein, January 11, 2022, Sportshandle, <https://sportshandle.com/sports-betting-scandals-history/>
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