



The United Methodist Church
The Philadelphia Area Episcopal Office
(*Eastern Pennsylvania and Peninsula-Delaware Conferences*)

Bishop Peggy A. Johnson

P.O. Box 820
Valley Forge, PA 19482-0820
(610) 666-1442; FAX: (610) 666-9181



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On October 26, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives voted 109-72 to approve a significant expansion of gambling in our state, House Bill 271. The bill was approved by the state Senate the previous day. Four days after the House action, Governor Tom Wolf signed the legislation into law. The legislation was quickly moved, taking only 18 hours between its introduction and its passage in the House. In fact, lawmakers had only two hours to read the massive 939-page bill. This stealthy rush through the General Assembly minimized scrutiny. Obviously, public input was thwarted.

This new law will create 10 mini-casinos in regions without a casino, allow some truck stops to operate video gaming terminals, regulate fantasy sports and online gambling, legalize online gambling portals at casinos and airports, permit the state lottery to sell tickets and offer games online, and legalize sports betting (if Congress allows it nationally). Proponents of this legislation hope to open gambling to new markets, especially younger players.

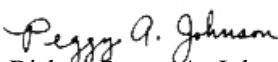
Only Nevada exceeds Pennsylvania in commercial casino revenues. This law marks the biggest expansion of gambling in the state, since it first legalized casinos more than a decade ago. Pennsylvania now becomes the fourth state with internet gambling and the first to allow both casino and lottery games online.

But, this is not the end, there is still a way that the public can respond. A provision in the new law allows municipalities to opt out of this gambling expansion. **Local governments may pass a resolution prohibiting a “mini-casino” within the boundaries of their municipality. Such a resolution must be sent to the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board by December 31, 2017.** County governments have the same option regarding truck stop gambling. Many lawmakers, who voted against this legislation, are recommending such action. There is not much time.

The UM Social Principles state, *“Gambling is a menace to society, deadly to the best interests of moral, social, economic, and spiritual life, [and] destructive of good government... As an act of faith and concern, Christians should abstain from gambling and should strive to minister to those victimized by the Practice... Organized and commercial gambling is a threat to business, breeds crime and poverty, and is destructive to the interests of good government. It encourages the belief that work is unimportant, that money can solve all our problems, and that greed is the norm for achievement. It serves as a “regressive tax” on those with lower income. In summary, gambling is bad economics; gambling is bad public policy and gambling does not improve the quality of life.”*

As bishop of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, I strongly urge members, clergy and conference agencies to act during this limited response period. Prayer followed by meaningful and effective action is an exercise of faith. We ask that you contact your local government councils, as soon as possible. Ask when the next meeting will be and ask to have this mini-casino prohibition put on their agenda. Plan for residents to attend these meetings and be ready to support this resolution.

Sincerely,


Bishop Peggy A. Johnson