

Council Statement on Casino Gambling

August 25, 1993

The Council of Religious Leaders has a deep concern for the peace and welfare of Metropolitan Chicago. Specifically, we are concerned about the issues of poverty, inadequate housing, health care and a satisfactory level of employment opportunities. We applaud the mayor's continuing interest in economic development that can bring jobs to Chicago, especially for those hundred of thousand of our fellow citizens who are currently locked out of the mainstream economy.

The issue of Riverboat Gambling is among the latest proposals to deal with the economic and employment issues of our metropolitan area. Many of the judicatories related to our organization have made specific and strong statements opposing the development of additional gambling as the source of economic development for the city. A decision to develop a gambling base, often getting money from those least able to afford it, sows the seeds of economic and personal deterioration, not hope and strength.

We are aware of at least 18 different initiatives that are now in one phase of development or another--all aimed at strengthening our metropolitan area. We urge the city administration to take seriously the concerns and interests of these groups and to seek through planning to develop a base for the economic and social life of this community that will give it new strength and hope. We believe that it is time to pull together our best minds and energies to create an economic development strategy for the city that focuses on productive work and the rebuilding of our communities. We would willingly be part of any effort which deals with these basic issues and concerns.

In regard to continuing proposals for the spread of gambling enterprises to the City of Chicago, the Council remains convinced that there are far more sound and compelling visions of economic and civic development than are offered in such proposals. We dismiss the often heard statement that moral and ethical concerns regarding gambling's effects are no longer at issue. They are at issue, and any claim to the contrary is false and misleading.

The Council of Religious Leaders reaffirms its basic position that the continued spread of gambling is poor public policy and an inadequate response to the needs of the community. Gambling is regressive in its economic effect, morally repugnant to many and is demonstrably harmful to a growing number of individuals and families. Whatever benefit may derive from the spread of gambling in Chicago and the State of Illinois will be far outweighed by its negative and debilitating effect upon our community and our private lives.