

Don't gamble on casinos

By [ELAINE BONO](#)

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Few votes in the Legislature will have such lasting effects on Massachusetts' economic, cultural and social fabric, as will those on casinos and slot machines.

With budget deficits looming, exploring alternative revenue sources is understandable. However, legislators should not solve budget gaps with voluntary losses of money by their most gullible constituents. The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts believes that:

- Gambling is no substitute for an equitable tax system or a reasonable tax policy;
- Gambling revenues are an inequitable and regressive kind of tax as well as a poor, unreliable and unpredictable source of revenue;
- The estimated \$400 million to be raised in "new revenues" by legalizing slot machines will come mostly from working families and senior citizens;
- Gamblers will have to lose over \$2 billion a year for the state to reap \$400 million in revenue.
- Out-of-state residents will contribute a small percentage of the slot revenue, but the major portion will come from our residents; research indicates that 85 percent of gambling patrons in states with slots live locally.

Some argue that casinos provide ancillary economic benefits, particularly jobs, for local communities. Although a new facility will bring jobs initially, particularly during construction, experience suggests an ultimate net loss in jobs. Expanded gambling did not bring the promised economic development to various states with casinos or to Atlantic City.

I lived in southeastern Connecticut for 30 years, 15 minutes from the world's largest casinos. In order to keep more casinos from being built, Connecticut repealed its Las Vegas Night law. Business opposed additional casinos because they hurt small businesses. Casinos also hurt state lottery revenues. A dollar spent in a casino is a dollar not spent in a local restaurant, theater, or retail store.

Problems with containing, moderating, and fixing the limits of gambling worsen once Class III gambling is legalized. Under the Federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, if Class III gambling is legalized here, any recognized Native American tribe can also engage in the same level of gambling. Although currently we have only two recognized Native American tribes in Massachusetts, six more await federal recognition. In Connecticut, there were about 10 tribes seeking recognition and planning to build casinos before we put a stop to it.

Finally, look at the social problems associated with casinos. While most people who frequent casinos do so responsibly, a significant number become compulsive gamblers. Gambling can trigger addiction, and this addiction has become an epidemic, especially among youth.

Gambling attracts crime, victimizes the poor, and presents a poor example to our children. Gambling can cause family problems, including domestic violence, bankruptcies, and suicides. Casinos attract drugs and prostitution. I witnessed all of these ills firsthand in Connecticut.

These problems cause much grief and suffering and cost taxpayers lots of money. For example, the Ledyard tax collector, a woman entrusted with public money, embezzled \$300,000 from the town's coffers and gambled it all at slots before she was caught. It took taxpayer money and town employee time to bring her to justice and to fight the insurance company to reimburse Ledyard for monies lost.

Embezzlements also happened in the Sprague town hall, the Stonington town hall, a local auto dealer, a local lawyer's office, and so on. People in positions of trust stole ours and other people's money. With a casino nearby, it is all too convenient for some people to go daily before or after work (or sometimes both) to gamble away their money and sometimes other people's money.

Casino gambling might be voted on by the Legislature any day now. Remember — this is not a done deal! Legislators seem to be equally divided on this issue and want more feedback from the voters. Call your legislators now!

For legislators phone numbers, mailing addresses and email addresses, visit www.palmer.casinofacts.org