

The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania
226 Forster Street, Harrisburg, PA 17102-3220
(717)234-1576 phone and fax

**Testimony before the Judiciary Committee of the
Pennsylvania House of Representatives on HB 295 on May 28, 1997**

Thank you Chairman Gannon for holding hearings on HB295 and granting the League's request to testify. Your letter dated May 23 notes that you have broadened the scope of these hearings beyond the three referenda questions contained in the Bill. We should like to speak about both the proposed ballot questions and the issues surrounding the legalization of new kinds of gambling in Pennsylvania.

Regarding the wording of the three referenda, we feel strongly that all three questions should be change from the current form as in question one, which reads:

“ Shall Pennsylvania adopt legislation to provide a mechanism by which counties, through local option, may permit a licensed and regulated system for riverboat gaming?” to the following form

Shall Pennsylvania adopt legalization to permit riverboat gambling in Pennsylvania?

Shall Pennsylvania adopt legislation to permit licensed and regulated slot machines at horse racing tracks?

Shall Pennsylvania adopt legislation to permit gambling devices at taverns (assuming this term adequately describes the establishments with legal liquor licenses that the sponsors of this Bill intend)

We feel that this form of the question should be used in all three instances, because all citizens in Pennsylvania deserve an opportunity to comment on the substance of the legislation, which needs to be regulated by the State. The impact of any of these three proposed measures would reach beyond the counties in which they were physically located should it be positive or negative. Revenue gained or ultimately lost by our State affects all citizens, and all citizens would have the opportunity to gamble at these many established sites. We prefer that the General Assembly use the accurate term, gambling, not gaming, as we know that shuffleboard is not what is being proposed.

Regarding the substance of these proposals, the Committee has already heard from the League that we do not consider the expansion of legal gambling to be sound economic or social policy. In the instance of racetrack gambling, it seems patently obvious that new customers would be coming to the track, not to view the horse races but to gamble, as they now would have land based casinos at hand at four sites in the State. Clearly the proposal to permit gambling machines at taverns tremendously increases the numbers of Pennsylvanians who will have very easy access to the opportunity to gamble away salaries, mortgage, and rent money.

(2)

League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania cont'd

When you calculate the revenue from taxes and licenses, don't forget to subtract the cost of lost productivity, families who lose their breadwinner, embezzlement and theft by folks who never thought of stealing before, additional law enforcement, social services, and addiction counseling costs, and all those unbought tickets to the Flyers, Phillies, Eagles, Steelers, and Pirates' games. Ask Jerry Bell of the Minnesota Twins what happened to their gate after casino gambling came to Minnesota. It only takes a very small percentage of thousands of new gamblers who become addicted to cost the State millions of dollars.

In summary, we do not feel that the gambling industry offers our citizens the easy new revenue they have been wooed to expect, and in the instance of HB 295, the referenda as currently stated, do not offer a direct, clear opportunity for all the voters in Pennsylvania to register their opinions.

Kay McKenna,

Gambling Specialist, LWVPA