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To: House Judiciary Committee
From: David Tamisiea, Executive Director
Re: HCR 3002 - Sports Betting
Date: Jan 15, 2025

The North Dakota Catholic Conference opposes House Concurrent Resolution 3002.

Although the Catholic Church teaches that games of chance or wagers are not in themselves immoral, they become morally unacceptable when they deprive a person of what is necessary to provide for his or her own needs or those of others.¹ In addition, the common good must always be protected. Today, the passion for sports betting carries a high risk of becoming an enslavement and of diminishing the noble aspects of sport. Sports betting presents a serious threat to the human person and undermines the common good. For this reason, the North Dakota Catholic Conference opposes any expansion of this kind of gambling in North Dakota.

HCR 3002 would legalize, for the first time in the state's history, for-profit gambling operations, and would mark a major cultural shift. This unprecedented change to the gambling laws in North Dakota poses even greater threats those who suffer from gambling addictions, their families, and the common good than does the mere expansion of charitable gaming in the state.

HCR 3002 would make gambling easy and accessible 24/7 from any computer or smartphone. It would effectively put a sports-book casino in every bedroom, dorm room, living room, and workplace in North Dakota. Combining easy access by cell phone or laptop to the lure of gambling is like adding gasoline to fire. Just as ready access to online pornography has led to astronomical rates of porn addiction, the same dynamic can be expected with legalizing sports betting. Gambling addiction is associated with high rates of financial distress, divorce, substance abuse, depression, and suicide.

At the 2021 legislative session, the online sports betting platform DraftKings testified in support of legalizing sports betting in North Dakota and offered the state of New Jersey as a model for our state to follow: "In New Jersey, which has surpassed even Nevada to become the most successful state to implement sports betting, over 90% of bets are placed

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* No. 2413.

by customers using mobile apps and websites.”² But there is a dark side to the sports betting craze in New Jersey. Since 2018, the year New Jersey legalized sports betting, the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey has seen a **277%** increase in calls to its problem gambling helpline.³ The Council says this surge in calls comes mostly from young adults, and that the majority are young men betting on sports. According to a New Jersey government-commissioned report by the Rutgers University Center for Gambling Studies, the prevalence of high-risk problem gambling is now at **6%** of the state’s population.⁴ Gambling addiction has gotten so bad that in 2024 the governor of New Jersey established a special task force to address problem gambling in the state. Why would North Dakota ever want to go down this same road?

Sport at its best is good for the human person and society. It fosters virtues like diligence, courage, grit, self-sacrifice, commitment to excellence, and working with others toward a common goal. It has the capacity to draw people together from different cultures and backgrounds in friendly competition. There is a kind of joy in athletic competition not found in any other endeavor, and this joy can be participated in by fans.

Sports gambling, especially when facilitated by commercial operators, tends to spoil the nobility of sport. It reduces athletic contests to mere mercenary affairs for economic gain. It commodifies athletes and instrumentalizes them as objects of use contrary to their human dignity. Moreover, it does this without the athlete’s consent.

We urge a **Do Not Pass** recommendation on HCR 3002.

² Testimony of Rebecca London on behalf of DraftKings to the North Dakota House Judiciary Committee (February 17, 2021). Online at https://ndlegis.gov/assembly/67-2021/testimony/SFINTAX-3032-20210315-9077-F-LONDON_REBECCA.pdf.

³ Bobby Brier, “Surge in problem gambling in NJ - and in calls for help,” in *NJ Spotlight News* (September 26, 2024). Online at <https://www.njspotlightnews.org/2024/09/problem-gambling-surges-in-new-jersey-more-young-men-call-helpline-sports-betting/>.

⁴ L. Nower, J.F. Stanmyre, and V. Anthony, *The Prevalence of Online and Land-Based Gambling in New Jersey: Report to the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement*. New Brunswick, NJ: Authors (2023). Online at https://socialwork.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/2023-10/Prevalence_Report_2023_Final.pdf.