

June 30, 2015

Toronto City Hall
100 Queen St. West

Dear Members of Toronto City Council:

I am writing to you on behalf of Anglicans from across the City of Toronto to express our considerable concern at the prospect of Council permitting the expansion of organized gambling in the city. As Christians, Anglicans are called to stand with the marginalized and to be concerned with the needs of our neighbours who are least able to make ends meet. As part of this commitment Anglicans throughout Toronto have been active participants in the development of the city's interim municipal poverty reduction strategy while simultaneously supporting a variety of outreach and social programs in our own parishes for those experiencing poverty, homelessness and social isolation. Our concern for our neighbour is motivated by a commitment to the common good and a dedication to strengthen individuals, families, and communities. I believe that approving the development of a casino in Toronto would go against these very principles and I urge all members of City Council to vote against it.

In 2013 I joined with more than 250 interfaith leaders who signed a statement calling on the City of Toronto and other Greater Toronto Area municipalities to vote against any new casinos in our communities, recognizing that organized gambling is a predatory industry with considerable negative impacts on our communities. As far back as 1998 my predecessor, The Most Rev. Terence Finlay, wrote to Council to express the unanimous opposition of our Diocesan Synod to the development of casino establishments in the city. I recall these moments today as testament to our longstanding concern regarding this issue, and our commitment to continue to oppose these developments within the City of Toronto.

I recognize that municipal governments, in particular, need to identify new revenue streams in order to support the many vital services which are offered to their residents. However I believe that as a society we have an obligation to care for the most vulnerable among us and that the development of a casino would, instead, exploit individuals in precarious financial situations or struggling with addictions in order to pursue new revenue streams for government coffers. Studies show that those least able to afford the financial and personal fall-out of problem gambling are most impacted by the creation of ever new, more attractive gaming operations sanctioned by government. We know this from our own pastoral experience. While gambling revenue may seem like an easy source of money, the costs of problem gambling on both an economic and social level far outweigh any perceived benefits to government.



It is my sincere hope that Toronto City Council will listen to the concerns of a wide cross-section of Torontonians and once again vote against allowing the development of a casino within the city. As we carry on our shared work of pursuing poverty reduction in our city we must remain committed to rejecting the exploitation of our neighbours by pursuing equitable, sustainable revenue streams which serve the needs of Torontonians while allowing individuals and families to flourish within our communities. The City of Toronto cannot tout its commitment to poverty reduction while simultaneously endorsing an activity which results in such considerable financial and social impoverishment. By rejecting the development of a casino Council will send a clear message that their commitment to poverty reduction is more than just lip service and that Toronto can, indeed, choose another path forward.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colin R. Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

The Most Rev. Colin R. Johnson
Archbishop of Toronto