



## *Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland*

c/o UU Church of Annapolis | 333 Dubois Road | Annapolis, MD 21401  
410-353-5904 | [www.uulmmd.org](http://www.uulmmd.org) | [info@uulmmd.org](mailto:info@uulmmd.org)

### **Moral Aspects of the Slots Referendum**

#### **I. What moral principles do we apply to gambling in general?**

Many religious and spiritual leaders have spoken out in opposition to gambling on moral grounds, and there is considerable agreement among them on why they consider gambling “immoral.” Regardless of whether moral principles are given to humanity by a Lawgiver or derived from utilitarian notions of the Common Good, the primary objection to gambling is that it involves, promotes and relies on individuals taking unwarranted risks in the unreasonable hope of unearned personal gain that comes at the expense of others.

Gambling promotes values that all religions preach tirelessly against:

- Materialism – focus on material goods, money and comfort as primary goals
- Selfishness – lack of concern that winning is funded by many others’ losses
- Recklessness – willingness to risk personal or family resources on highly speculative chance at wealth
- Wealth without effort – hope for unearned (“something for nothing”) riches

In contrast, religions promote:

- Living a good life – virtue is more than seeking material things
- Compassion – caring for others in our community means not causing them loss and pain in order to advance our own selfish interests
- Stewardship – our resources and those of our planet should not be put at risk
- Earned income – an honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work

#### **II. What are the moral aspects of government promotion of slots?**

While it may be difficult to “legislate morality” (i.e. passing laws to make people behave in a certain way), people should be concerned when their governments actively promote unhealthy, destructive or immoral activity. There is ample evidence of the harmful effects of gambling on individuals, society and our economy.

- Individuals at risk for “problem” gambling are encouraged to become “pathological” gamblers.
- Family problems increase when gambling is involved

- Those most likely to gamble (and, therefore, most likely to lose resources) are found in the lower income levels of society
- As a source of income for government, gambling is regressive, in that it obtains more of its revenues from those with lower incomes
- Gambling generally does not bring “new” money into the state, it merely redirects it from other uses (e.g. local businesses)
- A government that becomes dependent on gambling as a revenue source is relying on an inconsistent level of funding

Our society cannot claim to be acting morally if we promote gambling, knowing that it increases pathological and criminal behavior, undermines families, and unduly burdens the poor for the benefit of a wealthy few and (marginally) some state programs.

## I. Why should we care about the slots referendum?

Although Maryland long ago established horse racing and lottery operations that continue to generate revenues for the state, expanding into video lottery terminals (VLTs) or “slot” machines is not warranted.

- Maryland’s initial foray into gambling essentially replaced the illegal “numbers” racket that was already operating in the state. The state-operated numbers game may have improved the odds of winning and provided a more stable and reliable system that was held accountable to the public for its operations.
- Establishing 15,000 VLTs in 5 locations around the state will ensure close proximity to problem gamblers everywhere and encourage them to gamble more.
- VLTs are considered highly addictive forms of gambling since:
  - They provide gamblers with an opportunity to place numerous bets within a short period of time, and
  - Venues are designed to keep people gambling as long as possible
- Although the legislation establishes a Problem Gambling Fund to deal with compulsive gambling, it will also engage the government in actively promoting gambling, working at cross purposes to the Fund.
- One-third of the net proceeds of slots goes to the license holders, assuring that a few wealthy people and entities will be enriched at the public expense.
- Claims that slots will increase school funding rely on an “accounting gimmick” since funding for education depends on enrollment, inflation, and other factors included in complex formulas, not on how much money is available. At most, slots could make more money available for non-educational uses.

Like cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption, gambling may be a legal activity (at least for adults). However, that does not mean that government should act to make any of these vices more accessible or promote their use. Approval of the slots referendum will only put gambling closer to people in our communities, bringing all of the harmful consequences that they have historically created. We oppose the measure on the moral grounds explained here.

UULM-MD is funded in part by the UU Fund for Social Responsibility and the UU Service Committee.