



FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The nonpartisan public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Florida

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The Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops (FCCB) has taken a formal position on three of the twelve amendments on the November 6, 2018, ballot. In order for an amendment to the Florida Constitution to pass, 60% of the electorate must vote in support.

Amendment 3: Voter Control of Gambling in Florida SUPPORT

Amendment 3 ensures that Florida voters shall have the exclusive right to decide whether to authorize casino gambling. While people of goodwill may differ as to whether decisions to expand gambling should be in the hands of elected officials or directly with voters, as well as whether such a policy direction should reside in the Florida Constitution, the FCCB supports Amendment 3.

At various points since 1978, and most recently in 2011, the bishops have weighed in on concerns about casino gambling. There is historical and anecdotal evidence that casino gambling is accompanied by vice and social evils. The impact of casino gambling on low and moderate income families and individuals, especially those for whom gambling becomes a compulsive behavior is not positive. Needy individuals are particularly vulnerable to the lure of the casino and the promise of great fortune. For those struggling to make ends meet, casino gambling can provide an attractive means to relieve financial burdens, which ultimately only leads to crushing debt and personal crisis.

While many churches, schools, and other non-profit organizations rely upon games of chance for relatively small amounts revenue, most people recognize the difference between local fundraisers managed by volunteers and a multi-billion-dollar industry that exploits vulnerable members of the community for financial gain.

Amendment 4: Voting Restoration Amendment SUPPORT

Amendment 4 allows for the automatic restoration of a felons' voting rights (with exceptions for those convicted of murder or felony sexual offenses) after completing all sentencing terms, including restitution, parole, or probation.

Florida is one of only four states in the country that does not allow automatic restoration of a felon's rights after completing a sentence. Currently, our state only restores their rights after approval by the governor and cabinet, acting as the clemency board. On February 1, 2018, a U.S. district court ruled Florida's current process for the restoration of voting right unconstitutional. That ruling is under appeal.

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Crime and violence that threaten the lives and dignity of Floridians cannot be tolerated; yet society may not give up on those who have lost their way. The Criminal Justice system holds offenders accountable for their actions; however, punishment must include a constructive and redemptive purpose. As nearly all inmates will return to society, their reintegration must be encouraged. Restoring their right to vote is a meaningful step to engage their full participation in their communities.

While amending the Florida Constitution to ensure the restoration of voting rights is not ideal, it seems to be the only practical way to achieve this policy goal outside of pursuing an uncertain path in the courts. The FCCB supports Amendment 4.

Amendment 6: Rights of Crime Victims; Judges OPPOSE

Amendment 6 purports to create rights for victims of crime. The Church stands with victims of crime and their families, but most of these rights already exist in statutory law and it is unclear how incorporating these in the Florida Constitution would meaningfully benefit victims of crime. The duplication of these rights was noted as the proposal was debated by the Constitutional Revision Commission.

The proposal also establishes deadlines of five years for capital cases and two years for non-capital cases within which appeals should be completed. Significant numbers of those who have been released from Florida's death row were exonerated after five years. Such a weighty matter should not have an artificially-imposed period; to add one to the Constitution is improper.

While the amendment includes a common sense proposal to increase the retirement age for judges in Florida, its problematic provisions prompt FCCB to oppose Amendment 6.

The bishops urge voters to consider Catholic Social Teaching and consult the document, [Considerations Before Voting on Constitutional Amendments](https://www.flaccb.org/documents/2018/10/ConsideringAmendments.pdf) (found on the FCCB website at: <https://www.flaccb.org/documents/2018/10/ConsideringAmendments.pdf>) as they discern their vote on the remaining nine amendments on the ballot.