



NEW JERSEY STATE ARCHIVES COLLECTION GUIDE

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Institutional History

The regulation of gambling has been a controversial topic in New Jersey throughout the twentieth century. Beginning with the legalization of horserace betting by constitutional amendment in 1939, through the approval of a State Lottery in 1969 and casino gambling in 1976, the Legislature has been faced with heated disputes and general discord over the issue within its chambers and in New Jersey's voter population.

After continued debate over the pitfalls and benefits of ten years of legalized casino gambling, the Legislature established The Governor's Advisory Commission on Gambling by an act passed 6 October 1986 (P.L. 1986, chap. 115, p. 753). The Commission was charged with the duty of studying the social and economic impact of gambling upon New Jersey and determining "the best way to conduct legalized gaming in the State." The establishing legislation justified the commission's creation by stating that there were an estimated 375,000 compulsive gamblers in New Jersey and that the State had looked increasingly to revenue from gambling, both in its existing forms and in new forms, to solve its fiscal problems.

The Commission was to consist of nineteen members, to serve without compensation: nine public members appointed by the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the Assembly, and the Governor; and ten official members including several cabinet officers, the chairmen of the New Jersey Casino Control Commission, the New Jersey Racing Commission, the State Lottery Commission and the Atlantic City Casino Association, and the director of the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey. Specifically, the Advisory Commission was directed to hold public hearings on gambling and to report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature not later than twelve months after enactment of the creating legislation. An appropriation of \$50,000 was made to support the Commission's work.

The Governor's Advisory Commission on Gambling held its organizational meeting on 24 April 1987. Stephen J. Batzer of Margate had been appointed chairman by Gov. Kean in March. Despite the initial twelve-month deadline, the commissioners held public hearings until 10 June 1988. During this time they heard testimony from various "gambling experts," government officials and members of the public. They also debated the important issues among themselves and spoke to executives from the various aspects of legalized gambling.

On 30 June 1988, the commissioners presented their report and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature. While they admitted only limited success in carrying out the Commission's overall mission, they *were* able to reach certain conclusions. First, the commission found that casino taxation and the State Lottery accounted for 7% of the State budget. Second, while the social burdens caused by gambling were more difficult to quantify and were "slower to reach the level of public awareness needed for their proper identification and resolution," the commission concluded that there were obvious costs associated with legalization. These included an increase in Index Crime in Atlantic City

since the advent of casino gambling in 1978, a disturbing rise in the extent of compulsive gambling in New Jersey, and the attraction of "parasitical elements" such as loansharks, prostitutes and disorderly persons.

The commissioners also made very general recommendations on how public policy should address collectively the components of legalized gambling: first, that each form of gambling be expected to achieve an expressly worthwhile public purpose and not to be considered an end unto itself; second, that each component of legalized gambling remain limited and restricted so as to avoid unchecked growth and increased social and governmental costs; and third, that gaming be allowed to operate only in highly controlled, strictly regulated environments. In summary, they advised that New Jersey never risk weakening its regulatory system to enhance the State's fiscal condition or to offset economic downturns or competition from within or outside New Jersey's borders.

Bibliography

Lehne, Richard. "A Contemporary Review of Legalized Gambling in New Jersey" [paper prepared at the request of the Governor's Advisory Commission on Gambling]. *Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries*, 50(2):57-103, December 1988.

Report and Recommendations of the Governor's Advisory Commission on Gambling. (Trenton, NJ: 30 June 1988).

Content Note

This series consists of transcripts of the proceedings of the Governor's Advisory Commission on Gambling from its organizational meeting of 24 April 1987 to 10 June 1988. The transcripts were originally maintained by the South Jersey Center for Public Affairs at Stockton State College, whose faculty members, Drs. Bruce Ransom and Michael Frank, served as secretaries to the commission. The proceedings include remarks of Commission members and testimony of "gambling experts" and government officials.

Duplicate transcripts are included for most of the meeting dates. Those stamped as "ORIGINAL" are referred to as such in the **Contents** list below; however, other transcripts not marked as such may also be original copies.

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