



# The Methodist Church

## CHESTER & STOKE-ON-TRENT DISTRICT

Methodist District Centre  
Bishop's Wood  
Nantwich  
CW5 7QD

Tel: 01270 627774

E-mail: [do.chestoke@fish.co.uk](mailto:do.chestoke@fish.co.uk)

Web-site: [www.chestokemethodists.com](http://www.chestokemethodists.com)

Mrs Gwyneth Dunwoody MP  
House of Commons  
Westminster  
London

February 19<sup>th</sup> 2004

Dear Mrs Dunwoody

### **RE: Draft Gambling Bill**

I am writing to express my concerns about the draft Gambling Bill trusting that you will be using your constructive influence to amend the bill.

I understand that 94% of the population thinks that allowing people to gamble using credit cards would put people at greater risk of incurring gambling debts. The average household unsecured debt is currently £6000; for problem gamblers, it is estimated to be £19000. Particularly worrying is the proposal for new Category A machines (Jackpot machines with limitless stakes and limitless prizes) which research suggests are highly addictive. Under the new proposals, mega-casinos will be allowed an unlimited number of these machines. The government should impose a strict limit on the number of Jackpot Machines in casinos. If monitoring shows that there is no rise in problem gambling after a few years, this limit could be slowly revised upwards.

Britain is the only Western jurisdiction which allows children of any age to play on slot-machines. One research study of 10,000 12-15 year olds suggested that around 1 in 20 already demonstrates behaviour which classifies them as problem gamblers on slot machines. Their behaviour – which includes lying and stealing, disrupted relationships and distracted behaviour at school – impacts on the children, their families and those around them.

The government proposes to re-classify slot-machines so that Categories A, B and C are gambling machines for adults but category D machines are amusement machines for children. You can win £5 on Category D machines – trivial for an adult, but a significant amount of money for a child as young as 8 years old. Children will still be able to play these machines in unregulated and unsupervised venues, for example in chip shops. Children should be prohibited from playing on Category D machines immediately. Failing that, research should be put in place upon which the government is prepared to act.

The new Gambling Commission will draw up codes of responsibility by which operators will have to abide if they are to keep their licences. One of these should be preventing children's access to gambling – e.g. requiring positive age checks at the entrance to gambling premises.

Thank you for all you do as an active MP in this area and your willingness to represent your constituents' views. The views I have expressed are widely held within the Methodist constituency.

Yours sincerely

John D Walker