



MEDIA ADVISORY

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NYPIRG URGES THE USE OF A FAIR DESCRIPTION OF CASINO BALLOT QUESTION

New York is debating whether the state's constitution should be amended to allow the operation of up to seven casinos in the state (Proposal #1). NYPIRG has not taken a position in support of or in opposition to this proposal.

However, NYPIRG has been deeply troubled by the ballot question (Proposal #1) and language that was certified by the State Board of Elections, language that seems to go beyond explanatory or descriptive and instead has become advocacy in support of Proposal 1. The language recites many of the predicted benefits of approval advanced by casino boosters. Yet neither the ballot question nor the abstract language refer to what critics predict are the likely down sides of approving the proposal. The language appears to be worded in a way that would incline a neutral voter to vote "yes."

When it comes to ballot questions, language matters. Without doubt many voters will cast votes based solely on reading the ballot language for the first time when they are at their polling site on Election Day. They may have heard little about the proposal to inform their decision. For this reason the State Board of Elections must take care to ensure that the proposal is framed in a way that is neutral. Unfortunately, it chose not to do so.

NYPIRG believes that New Yorkers are entitled to a neutral ballot proposal—not one which subtly or overtly nudges a voter in a particular direction. The media will play an important role in educating voters on the six ballots questions on the ballot this November. **We urge you not to embrace the State Board of Elections' advocacy language. Instead, choose one of two options when educating the public on this question.**

Option #1: Play it straight. Simply do not use the language that is written to drive voters to vote "yes" on Proposal #1. Instead merely state the constitutional amendment language itself:

"Proposal #1 permits the state to allow the establishment of up to seven casinos in New York.

Option #2: Add possible negative impacts of casino gambling. The Board of Elections language only offers purported benefits from the expansion of casino operations. If that language is used, it is important to point out possible drawbacks that have been cited by critics (*e.g.* recent New York Times editorial).

Proposal #1 permits the state to allow the establishment of up to seven casinos in New York State for the legislative purposes of promoting job growth, increasing aid to schools, and permitting local governments to lower property taxes through revenues generated.

However, critics have identified problems associated with expanded casino use: That gambling is a regressive tax that takes its highest toll on those who can least afford it. It can also lead to an addiction that can harm individuals and their families. Moreover, casinos often bring higher crime rates and deterioration of the communities nearby.