

## No casinos in my backyard, please

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My family immigrated to Canada in 2001 and lived in North York, Toronto until we moved to Concord, Vaughan the past year. Although I did not live in the city of Vaughan at the time I opted to make the 45 minute public transit commute each morning to attend St. Elizabeth Catholic High School. While I could have attended a community school in the Jane and Finch area that is only minutes away from the apartment where my family lived, I did not want to become another youth who would succumb to drugs and gangs like many of my peers that I had grown up with in the area. When my family finally moved to the city of Vaughan in the past year I was delighted because to me it meant I no longer had to fear walking home late at night and that once and for all I could get away from the congested streets of Toronto, where air and noise pollution dominated the environment and gang culture would result in the violent death of a student as young as 14 on school property (Jordan Manners was gunned down in the hallways of C. W. Jefferys in 2011, a high school that was 5 minutes away from where my family lived in North York).

Moving to the City of Vaughan has been a very welcomed change for my family, where after years of hard work and saving by my parents, we purchased a house away from Toronto. To me, the city of Vaughan has always signified family values, everything from the Vaughan Mills Shopping Centre to the Wonderland amusement park. I have many fond memories of the City of Vaughan, where I obtained one of my first part time jobs working as a cashier at Sears in Promenade and held one of my first art exhibits as a fine arts student in the Regional Arts Program in St. Elizabeth Catholic High School.

I was deeply disappointed when the Ontario Lottery and Gaming (OLG) association recently added the city of Vaughan as a potential site for a new casino in the province of Ontario. To me, casino and family values do not go hand in hand. In fact, numerous studies have found that casinos are associated with higher rates of bankruptcies, arrests, imprisonment and divorce. Furthermore, an Ontario based research on university studies and gambling behaviour found that students who lived close to a casino manifested more serious problem gambling than students far from a casino. What the proponents of a casino in the Greater Toronto Area are neglecting are those who are most vulnerable: youths who have the potential to attend a post-secondary institution who may now become addicted to gambling; low-income families who see gambling as a potential solution to their debts and problems and the elderly who live on meager pensions.

Casinos often promise many things that they cannot deliver. For example, while there may be a sudden surge in new jobs during the construction phase of a casino, these contract positions quickly disappear when the construction has completed. Furthermore, while it is true that opening any new business venture would add more jobs, positions in the gambling industry are low skilled, low paid and more often part-time. They separate young children from their families as shift work often keeps parents working into the late hours of the evening.

Currently with the provincial drinking age set at 19 and the legalization of brothels and prostitution, the development of a casino in the city will not only attract potential gamblers but also users of illicit services and substances. We already know that gambling is a common among Ontario adolescents, with one report citing 42.6% of students reporting involvement in at least one gambling behaviour in the past year. While the most common gambling activities are cards and lottery tickets, and the least common are Internet gambling and casino gambling, the increased accessibility of a casino in our backyard will

surely lead to a shift in existing statistics. In fact, research has shown that having a casino merely 15 kilometers to someone's home will increase the likelihood that one or more members of the household will participate in gambling by 90%. After controlling for age and sex, problem gamblers are significantly more likely to report substance related problems, mental health and delinquency (which includes theft and drug distribution).

This is not the vision that my family had when we decided to move to the City of Vaughan, this is also not the vision that I had for my new community and the future generations to come. On May 11<sup>th</sup>, I along with many other members of the community participated in a peaceful protest of the development of a casino in the City of Vaughan. While the mayor remains ambivalent about the possibility of a casino in our city, I decided to be vocal and advocate for the citizens of Vaughan.

For these reasons and more, I hope that my new community, the citizens of Vaughan will think harder about the potential negative impacts of a casino in our backyard and not be swayed by empty promises of gaming conglomerates that will ultimately hurt us and our children in the long term.

Sincerely,

Ellie Shuo Jin  
Concerned citizen, resident of Concord, Ontario