

**CONNECTICUT COUNCIL on
PROBLEM
GAMBLING**

Written Statement of Diana Goode, Executive Director

Connecticut Council on Problem Gambling

Public Safety & Security Committee

Informational Forum on Gaming

Monday, January 24, 2022

Sen. Osten, Rep. Horn, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Diana Goode, Executive Director of the Connecticut Council on Problem Gambling (CCPG). CCPG does not advocate for or against gambling but is committed to working with all stakeholders to help individuals and families struggling from gambling related harm, as well as persons affected.

The expansion of gambling to include online games, sports betting, I-Lottery, and internet keno have brought a significant change to the state. While many have focused on the economic benefits, at CCPG, it is our charge to consider the very real adverse impact that the expansion has and will have on constituents and provide them with resources.

Connecticut has approximately 3,565,000 citizens. That means that over 100,000 citizens and over 275,000 family members are negatively impacted by gambling every day. Using current population models, gambling related problems directly affects 735 individuals and 1,911 family members in each House district and 3,056 individuals and 7,946 family members in each Senate district.

Through our experiences on the front lines of those affected, we wanted to share some of the lessons that we have learned and to ask for your help to enable us to further help others in need.

One of our most pressing concerns is that of funding. In the enabling legislation last year, an additional 1 million dollars was added to the Chronic Gamblers Treatment and Rehabilitation Fund. Those monies, traditionally, pay for problem gambling treatment programs. The prevention, advocacy, training, and outreach has, in the past, been funded by voluntary contributions from the gambling industry. The legislation codified this practice requiring Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods, as master wagering license

holders, to contribute \$500,000 each toward gambling awareness programs. However, the legislation enabled the master wagering license holders to deposit those monies with either the CGTR fund or a nonprofit/s without specifying that those funds would be used for prevention. Additionally, it was our understanding, and that of many legislators that we have spoken with, that the previous voluntary contributions would continue. That has turned out not to be the case, resulting in our organization receiving a nominal increase of funding from the levels that we had from those organizations in years past. Unfortunately, that level of funding will in no way allow us to respond appropriately to the increased needs that we are seeing and anticipate to come.

Our calls, texts, and chats to our Helpline have increased dramatically. Every day we hear stories of people that have had their lives significantly impacted by gambling. We received calls from spouses who sought treatment for their partners who've lost thousands of dollars from sports betting and now their marriages are in jeopardy. We have heard stories from parents whose children in college lost their tuition money in online casinos. We have heard from employers that have employees taking money from the company to continue to gamble. We have heard from adult children about their senior parents, on fixed incomes, that put what little money they have towards their gambling, often at the cost of sometimes not having enough money to eat. Not to address the elephant in the room, but just last year, the members of this committee saw firsthand, how when gambling disorders go untreated, that lives, families, and careers can be destroyed.

With the funding that we have our ability to market our Helpline to at risk populations is severely diminished. With online gaming, all of the traditional channels of outreach no longer apply. What limited marketing that we can put out there is drowned out by huge marketing blitzes that often offer predatory ads that promise no risks betting or free money to make those bets. Further straining our resources is the lack of customer service numbers at some of the platform providers resulting in thousands of calls to our Helpline complaining about account issues. Additionally, the ads and radio spots that inform people about our Helpline are unclear, believing many to think that our number is the customer service line. We have also had complaints of the sound dropping out so people can't actually hear the number. We believe that this must be fixed in future ads. Having allowed the expansion to happen, it is the responsibility of the state to protect those very citizens that have been put in harm's way with the tools needed to seek help. With all of the news articles of the vast sums of money that the expansion of gambling has brought into the coffers of the gaming industry and to the state, we find it troubling that the needed resources to help us inform those same citizens simply aren't there. Connecticut can do better.

Voluntary self-exclusion can be a beneficial and empowering tool for those who feel they may be developing or have a problem with their gambling. By creating a barrier, it allows people to decrease or stop their gambling activities. We believe that in order for self-exclusion to be an effective tool, it needs to be adjusted.

Unfortunately, we are seeing issues with the system as it currently stands. While there are many people that can go to the casino on occasion and gamble responsibly, those same individuals may realize that they have issues with online gaming. There are others that enjoy playing Powerball or buying the occasional scratch ticket but have problems at a physical gambling establishment.

Allowing individuals to exclude from all gambling opportunities is an important part of voluntary self-exclusion. In addition to the current model, we propose an ala carte approach that lets individuals choose various components to select to self-exclude from, including all forms of gambling using one form.

We would like to see a system in place that incorporates all self-exclusion options under one umbrella rather than being redirected to various other sites. We understand that, in the case of the casinos being sovereign tribal entities, this may be challenging, but hopefully an agreement can be put in place that would greatly impact those affected by gambling related problems. We propose creating a statewide VSE taskforce, in order to consolidate and align processes with representatives from the treatment, prevention, regulatory, and gambling industries working together to continue to make voluntary self-exclusion as user friendly and impactful as possible.

Lastly, the effects of the expansion of gambling are going to reverberate on our population for decades to come. All the data at our disposal to understand those impacts are outdated and hinders our ability to direct prevention and treatment options accordingly. With that in mind, the state urgently needs to commission a prevalence study to better understand the scope of the impact on the citizens of the state.

I sincerely appreciate the committee's invitation to participate in this informational forum. I look forward to working with all of you in the upcoming session and I am available to answer any questions that the members may have.