



**WRITTEN STATEMENT OF DIANA GOODE**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**CONNECTICUT COUNCIL ON PROBLEM GAMBLING**

**PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE**

**Monday, March 14, 2022**

***H.B. No. 5419 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES' RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING REGIONAL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ACTION ORGANIZATIONS.***

Sen. Abrams, Rep. Steinberg, and Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill concerning the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' recommendations regarding Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations. My name is Diana Goode, Executive Director of the Connecticut Council on Problem Gambling (CCPG). Our organization wholeheartedly supports this bill and DMHAS's recommendation to codify the existing RHBAO structure. The RHBAO's have been an essential partner in our mission of connecting those impacted by gambling related harms to services and resources that can help those individuals and their families.

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.

The structure of the RHBAOs, where mental health, substance misuse, and problem gambling resources are combined in one organization, allows for the flexibility to recognize that many people do not suffer from any one affliction alone, but often a combination. 38% of people experiencing gambling problems have also had a substance use problem. Additionally, of those impacted by gambling disorder, those that had a substance use problem had a marked increase in suicidal behaviors.

The recent expansion of gambling last fall and the inescapable surge of advertising for it, has changed the landscape of our state. The new online offerings, especially, with sports betting, has engaged many new people towards the gambling platforms that would be considerably less likely to frequent a brick-and-mortar establishment. We feel that it is a vital investment for the state to have a robust problem gambling safety net and RHBAOs are a key partner.

However, we would be remiss if we didn't also share with the committee an area of that we are seeing now and project to increase in severity as time passes. The lack of education regarding the risks involved with gambling disallows many to be familiar with the signs associated with gambling disorder and the ability to then connect those with resources. CCPG is widely regarded as one of the preeminent training

providers for problem gambling matters in this state. Our organization has conducted or facilitated trainings on the many facets of problem gambling to behavioral health providers, but we need to do more. The growing need to provide training in the future on advanced clinical strategies and interventions to get more licensed clinicians certified in problem gambling and to provide continuing education for those who look for recertification is especially important. We propose a substitute to Sec 10 of this bill. Currently, CCPG receives 5% of the monies directed to the Chronic Gamblers Rehabilitation Fund, pursuant to section 12-818, and applies those funds towards operations of our 24/7 problem gambling helpline. We propose changing the language to not less than 10%. This additional revenue would allow us to facilitate offering the increased trainings necessary to begin to bridge the knowledge gap of providers around the topic of gambling related harm and gambling disorder.

Unfortunately, we have seen time and time again people and their families that are impacted by gambling related harms. Marriages destroyed, employment lost, retirements and educational funds exhausted, and insurmountable credit card debt. We need to be proactive and protect our citizens from gambling related harms through prevention, outreach, advocacy, treatment, and training programs that strengthen and strengthen the problem gambling safety net.

We ask for substitute language to be considered for this bill addressing some of the issues that we have outlined.

Thank you for your consideration and we are always available to answer any questions.

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The Connecticut Council on Problem Gambling (CCPG) is a non-profit organization focused on preventing gambling related harm and helping those who may be impacted. CCPG does not advocate for or against gambling but is committed to working with all stakeholders to help individuals and families dealing with this issue.

CCPG provides Connecticut's only 24-hour Problem Gambling Helpline – offering support via phone, live online chat, and text. We also implement prevention and education programs serving schools, veterans, and other at-risk populations.

If you or someone you know has a gambling problem, call the Problem Gambling Helpline at 1-888-789-7777 or visit [www.ccp.org/chat](http://www.ccp.org/chat) for confidential help.