



New York Council on Problem Gambling

Senate Committee on Racing, Gaming and Wagering

Legislative Public Hearing Testimony

Potential for Sports Betting in New York State

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Good morning Chairman Bonacic, members of the committee, my name is James Maney, and I am the Executive Director of the New York Council on Problem Gambling. Thank you for the invitation to provide testimony on problem gambling as it relates to the potential legalization of sports betting in New York State. The New York Council on Problem Gambling is a not-for-profit, independent corporation dedicated to increasing public awareness about problem and compulsive gambling and advocating for support services and treatment for persons adversely affected by gambling.

Twenty, even ten, years ago if we had known what the opioid crisis would look like in NYS we surely would have taken measures to avoid the epidemic of death and family destruction we are facing today. I think we all can agree we would have rather invested in prevention- educating prescribers and pharmacists, funding law enforcement, developing other solutions to pain management, than to be dealing with the aftermath. We HAVE that opportunity when it comes to sports betting and I hope that we will consider the outcomes that are potentially facing NYers because of legalization and therefore expansion.

In Australia where sports gambling has been legalized since the turn of the century they are referring to what has happened in their country as the “gambilization” of sports. Dr. Christopher Hunt of the University of Sydney Gambling Treatment Clinic in Australia reports that sports bettors make up one-third of the clinic’s patients. Sam Skolnik, author of “High Stakes: The Rising Cost of America’s Gambling Addiction,” believes the only thing truly inevitable about the future of sporting betting in the United States is that similar pitfalls to what Australia is experiencing will follow any expansion of legal sports betting. What Australia IS experiencing is a normalization of gambling for youth, an increase in problem gamblers, and a media marketplace overrun by gambling advertising. And it’s not just Australia experiencing

these woes, the United Kingdom has one of the most mature gambling markets in the world and is also dealing with similar problems.

What we know to be true in any vice exposure, whether it be substance abuse or gambling is that increased availability leads to increased participation, which leads to the inevitable increase in problems and addiction. Legalization of sports betting will be particularly risky for young people who are not already gambling, and who will see the legality and ease of access as an invitation to start. As one high school student we met with last week put it, "Since we are 17/18 (years old), the idea of betting some money in hopes of winning more money is a new and fun concept." With brains that are not fully developed for good judgement and early onset of risky behaviors, including gambling, we know there is a link to increased problems later in life. Once again, we are exposing NYS youth to a potentially dangerous activity with little education, safeguards or prevention in place and we are doing so without proper research on the impacts and without adequate services in place to address those impacts.

Several years ago, Governor Cuomo stated, "...all gaming activity conducted in the state will be of the highest integrity, credibility and quality, and that the best interests of the public, both gaming and non-gaming, will be served." To that end the New York Council on Problem Gambling recommends a proactive and comprehensive approach that includes prevention, intervention, treatment, research, cross systems and workforce development, and regulation and enforcement. Further details of the recommendation are outline below:

Prevention of problem gambling to assure that those who presently gamble without problems remain problem-free as well as to ensure that non-gamblers are educated on the risks. Strategies would target vulnerable, high-risk populations including adolescents, young adults, seniors, ethnic and linguistic minorities.

Intervention for those with gambling problems and other co-morbid conditions so that those who gamble with adverse consequences do not progress to develop further problems, but rather return to problem-free gambling or no gambling. Interventions include public

awareness and information, community education and professional training, and information, screening and referral services, including the NYS HOPEline and website resources.

Treatment for those with gambling problems or their family members, services that include a continuum of care aimed at recovery. These include: crisis care, outpatient treatment, residential treatment, after care and relapse prevention. As online forms of gambling become legalized, telehealth support and treatment services should be developed and offered online as well.

Research to investigate the public health consequences of gambling in New York and to support rigorous ongoing surveillance and evaluation to measure the impact of expanded gambling and provide valuable information to target programming to those most affected.

Cross Systems Services and Workforce Development

State agencies who serve consumers at high risk for gambling problems will be provided with resources and trained by NYS OASAS and NYS Office of the Professions to incorporate services for preventing, screening, intervening and treating gambling problems into their service delivery. The Department of Health, NYS Gaming Commission, Office of Mental Health, Commission on Higher Education, Office of Victim Services, Division of Parole, Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, Division of Probation and Correctional Alternatives, Division of State Police, SUNY, and the Division of Veteran's Affairs need to be offered these services as well to effectively and responsibly manage gambling problems in New York.

Regulation and Enforcement

Gambling legislation should include an aggressive regulatory structure that requires any applicant (existing or new) to assert proactively its plans to guarantee that it will comply with the highest standards of Responsible Gambling Programs. These policies and practices should closely follow the NYS Responsible Play Partnership's recommendations for *Best Practices for Problem Gambling Prevention and Intervention*

As British Columbia's health minister stated in a press release just last week related to the provinces recent investment in at-risk gamblers, "Like other addictions, a person struggling with a gambling addiction needs to know there is hope and help. Expanding prevention and awareness programs for gamblers, while also enhancing counselling and clinical options, is an important step in allowing people to get access to that help they need."

It has been relayed to us that when commercial casinos were introduced in legislation it was WITHOUT QUESTION that problem gambling would be addressed, and that dedicated funding was necessary to mitigate the impacts of casinos on communities, individuals, and families. Unfortunately, we did not see the same focus on support for problem gambling with the legalization and licensing of Interactive Fantasy Sports. But I urge that we realize dedicated funding is a necessity as sports gambling legislation is being introduced. Without the proper funding, the needed proactive and comprehensive services I previously described cannot be realized.

Dedicated funding for each newly legalized form of gambling introduced in New York State should no longer be a question, it should be a given.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak in advocacy of the many individuals and families struggling with problem gambling in New York State as well as on behalf of those who unfortunately will be casualties of the eminent expansion.

Resources

Future of sports betting: the pitfalls

<http://abcnews.go.com/Sports/future-sports-betting-pitfalls/story?id=43633226>

Gambling advisors coming to casinos

<https://www.bclocalnews.com/news/gambling-advisors-coming-to-casinos/>

NCPG Resolution on Legalization of Sports Betting

<https://www.ncpgambling.org/ncpg-resolution-on-legalization-of-sports-betting/>

Responsible Play Partnership: *Best Practices for Problem Gambling Prevention and Intervention*

<http://nyrghub.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Best-Practices-Manual-for-PreConf.pdf>