



New York Council on Problem Gambling

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON RACING, GAMING, AND WAGERING

ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RACING AND WAGERING

Joint Public Hearing

Tuesday

January 31, 2023

9:30 am

Hearing Room A

Legislative Office Building

Albany, New York 12248

Testimony Delivered by:

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Good morning, Chairman Addabbo and Chairman Pretlow, members of the committees, 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 reflections on the first year of legalized mobile sports betting (MSB) 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 disordered gambling and advocating for support services and treatment for persons adversely affected.

In preparation for this testimony, I reviewed the 2018 testimony I submitted for the hearing on The Potential of Sports Betting in NYS. At that hearing I shared that -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. I shared that we had that opportunity when it came to sports betting, and that I hoped we would consider the outcomes that were potentially facing NYS because of legalization and therefore expansion. Today I continue to echo those same sentiments.

After this first year of legalized MSB we have seen a 25% increase in calls to our regional Problem Gambling Resource Centers. While our system does not collect data on types of gambling activity, our call operators and clinicians have all shared they have seen an increase in callers/ clients indicating MSB as their gambling activity of choice. Of particular concern, to our Program Managers, has been the number of calls they have received from parents, especially mothers, of college-age sons who are addicted to online sports betting. According to a prevalence survey conducted by OASAS (Office of Addiction Services and Supports) in 2021, the youngest

age group of respondents, **18–24**, had the highest percentage of Problem Gamblers (24.8%) compared with their older counterparts. Interestingly, a public perception survey conducted in 2022 by the NYCPG showed that only 31% of NY adults BELIEVE that young adults aged 18-34 participate in gambling at higher-than-average rates. There is a disconnect here that needs to be remedied. Education is needed on all levels as it relates to the awareness that gambling can become a significant problem for young adults and that they are at much higher risk than the general population.

Additionally, according to the OASAS 2021 prevalence survey, of those Nyers who gamble 14.6% can be classified as problem gamblers. If we apply that percentage to the 3.8 million MSB accounts opened this past year, we have the potential of about 500,000 players experiencing some negative outcome because of betting on sports. It is often indicated that for every one problem gambler 7-10 other people are affected, apply this number and the impact is astronomical. To our knowledge, there are approximately 1000 individuals and family members who received treatment for their gambling problem in 2022. MUCH MORE needs to be done! While the infrastructure is in place to assist those in need, the awareness that services exist is not. NYCPG's 2022 public perception survey indicated that only 26% of Nyers are aware that a Problem Gambling Resource Center (PGRC) exists to serve their county. Without the resources to advertise PGRC services in a comprehensive way and engage those at a point of readiness for assistance, reaching those in need has been left primarily to the internet and google searches.

Not only has the lack of awareness that services exist prevented individuals from connecting to care, but there are thousands who are reaching out in several ways and yet somehow are being ignored. According to the NYS HOPEline they received 1902 calls related to problem gambling in 2021. PGRC records indicate that 165 of those calls made it to an

engagement session with a live person in the PGRC system. The HOPEline reports that 42% of callers accepted the warm transfer and 20% of those were connected to PGRC staff. What happens when we do not connect with a caller at 1AM when they reach out on a Monday night after major losses from the game? We lose them to another week of gambling and more losses because the crisis is over. What other potential consequences result; are they seriously depressed or suicidal, domestic violence, or fiscal crisis for their families? We do not know because we are missing the opportunity to assist them. There is a need for the PGRC phone lines to be answered 24/7. The current system and funding allow for calls to be answered Monday through Friday 9AM-5PM. THIS IS INADEQUATE.

According to statistics provided by the NY Gaming Commission, there are also 2,875 Nyers on the Voluntary Statewide Self Exclusion list, how many of those needed assistance or still do and we have not offered them so much as a phone call to check in and offer resources? Regulations need to be put in place to ensure that outreach to VSE registrants is an active process, not one that puts the onus on the individual in crisis to reach out. We should strive to make NYS VSE a program emulated across the country, a program where we truly assist, not just ban. Once services can be offered 24/7, PGRC operators stand ready to connect with individuals who are interested in and/or ready to enter the NYS VSE program. To walk them through the VSE process, provide support and encourage additional help if and where needed.

In conclusion, after a year of mobile sports betting, we can confidently say that 6 million dollars for problem gambling was NOT enough and in fact was less than 0.5% of total revenues. Three percent of the revenue owed to NYS was originally proposed to be dedicated to problem gambling services, had that been realized we would have seen closer to 21 million dollars for problem gambling services, a number much more in line with the need. With 21 million dollars

we could have placed 8-10 educators around the state to begin prevention work with parents and colleges. We could have put enough funds into awareness campaigns that address the risk for 18-24-year-olds. We could have dedicated funds to marketing efforts to increase the knowledge of Nyers that treatment exists. We could have ensured that at 1AM when someone reached out to us for help, there was ACTUALLY someone on the other end of the line to talk to as they contemplated their next steps, hopefully towards recovery and not the next time they will double down hoping to recoup their losses. Upon reflection, we are grateful for your joint committee's efforts to keep problem gambling a focus of importance, but we are disappointed at what could have been and what could have been done. I have shared these same sentiments in testimonies in 2018, 2019 and now in 2023, the need is only going to continue to grow, we must put efforts and adequate funds in place to protect the next generation. Thank you for your time and attention today and for including the Council's voice.

**Resources available upon request.**