

CONNECTICUT COUNCIL on
**PROBLEM
GAMBLING**

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Public Testimony: Bill No. 5378, an Act Concerning Video Slot Machines at Certain Off Track Betting Facilities
Date: February 5, 2015
Presented By: Cheryl Chandler, Interim Executive Director, CT Council on Problem (CCPG)
Presented To: Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee

My name is Cheryl Chandler and I am the Interim Executive Director of the CT Council on Problem Gambling (CCPG). Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the gambling addicts and family members we serve across CT. The CCPG is neither pro nor con gambling. Our mission is to reduce the prevalence and impact of problem and pathological (compulsive) gambling on individuals, families, and society. We often collaborate with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Problem Gambling Services in an effort to build capacity and avoid duplication of service.

This Bill would authorize, for the first time in CT, the placement of slot machines outside the two casinos. This would not only be an expansion of gambling, but an introduction to communities of the form of gambling found to be most closely associated with addiction. One example close to home is the fact that 46% of problem gamblers who called CCPG's Problem Gambling Helpline identified slot machines as the form of gambling with which they have a problem. (Helpline Report, 2013)

At no time, since gambling was legalized in CT, has a cost-benefit analysis been conducted. The primary factors that have driven the expansion of gambling have been how much revenue the gambling would produce and how many jobs would be created. Social costs, especially those associated with the impact on mental health and addiction problems, have not been assessed prior to introducing or expanding gambling. In 2008, the CT Legislature sponsored and funded a study on the impact of legalized gambling. The study found that an estimated 37,000 adults had a serious gambling problem and another 109,000 were at-risk for developing serious gambling problems. (Gambling in Connecticut: Analyzing the Economic and Social Impacts, Spectrum Gaming Group, 2009) Those receiving problem gambling related services are only a small fraction of these estimates.

Current funding for problem and underage gambling is insufficient to adequately address the need, especially for increasing public awareness among the underserved. A gambling disorder is as serious as an alcohol or other substance disorder in the effect on the individual, the family and

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the community, e.g. divorce, bankruptcy, crime and suicide. Therefore, the CCPG recommends that if Bill No. 5378 were to become law, it should contain the provision that a certain percentage of the revenue from slot machines in OTBs be allocated for prevention, treatment and research in problem and underage gambling.

Some of the initiatives that would be expanded, if there is additional funding, would include:

- Awareness/public relations campaign to inform the general public about the Problem Gambling Helpline, as well as the availability of treatment.
- Evidenced based prevention initiatives
- Treatment and Intervention, including peer support recovery services
- Outreach to high risk populations, including low socioeconomic groups and other underserved populations

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak and thank you for your public service. If you would like to discuss any of these points with me further, or if you would like any additional information, please feel free to contact me at the numbers provided: Office 860-664-3996, Cell number 860-985-9999.



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