

**Public Testimony:** Bill No. 1090, an Act Concerning Gaming  
**Date:** March 17, 2015  
**Presented By:** Donna Zaharevitz, Recovery Coach and Judicial Liaison, CT Council on Problem Gambling (CCPG)  
**Presented To:** Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee

1962 thru 1992 I had lead a normal pristine life. Wife, mother of four grown children, career woman, Pillar of the small town in which I live I had even run for the top political office in my town.

I was always the care giver at home and as my children started to leave the nest and my husband a funeral director in our town worked 24/7 I had no one to really care for anymore. I was involved with town activities, but that did not seem to fill the void I was used to as the care giver to my family.

I played the lottery, \$1.00 a day, went to church bingos with my neighbors, and casually attend the Casino.

I started going to the casino more often, there were people to talk with if I choose to do so, the sounds, the excitement, and the possibility of a big win I became a different person someone I didn't know anymore.

I was a slot player, and in the mind of a slot player the more money you put in a machine it has to hit. I had played a machine I just knew was going to hit, but ran out of money. I had been watching a neighbor's house a friend of mine for 30 years and took three of her checks with deposit slips because I was going to win and put the money back. The win did not happen and four weeks later I was arrested.

I woke up the next morning in a psych unit of a local hospital. When released turned myself into the police department and started my court appearance and after 12 months was giving AR and two years' probation.

During that time I tried to commit suicide three times and upon my last release from the hospital my husband of 36 years informed me we were getting a divorce.

I started treatment at a Bettor Choice Gambling Treatment program in Hartford and completed that program and have been gambling free 18 years as August 28 of this year.

I make no excuses for my actions, I made some pretty bad choices and there are consequences for those choices no one forced me to do what I did, but a gambling addiction is no different than a drug or alcohol addiction in fact it is much worse. We as gamblers keep this addiction hidden

for a very long time and only give it up when we are caught. We have no physical signs so no one really knows what is going on only we know something terribly is happening in our life.

Today I work with gamblers and family members who have been impacted by the gambler in the community as well as gamblers who are incarcerated due to gambling related crimes in our correctional facilities.

I have presented at the U.S. House of Representatives, local television, radio and also national T.V on the addiction .I'm not tell you this because I want any praise for what I do now, but to tell you the Better Choice Gambling treatment programs Connecticut have in place to help those with this addicted do work because if it were not for this program I would either be incarcerated today or would have completed my suicide attempt.

Funding is needed to continue these programs; it is much less expensive to fund these programs than it is to fund a problem gambler who is incarcerated.

I am not proud of what I did, but I am proud of what I do today and the best compliment I have had in the many years I have been doing this work it when someone comes up to me and says" Thank You, You Saved My Life."

Respectfully

Donna Zaharevitz