



Written Statement Susan Sheridan Tucker
Executive Director, Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling
Minnesota Sports Waging HF 778
House Tax Committee
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Chair Paul Marquart and Members of the Committee,

Good afternoon, I'm Susan Sheridan Tucker, Executive Director of Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling. For 20 years, we have been the state affiliate to the National Council on Problem Gambling. The Alliance is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of those affected by problem gambling through advocacy, education, training and research. We hold a neutral position on legalizing gambling. This means *we do not support or oppose* the expansion of sports betting in Minnesota. *We will insist, however, that any measure* affecting the accessibility of gambling provide for those adversely affected by this activity and *will oppose any bill* that does not include these provisions. This means funding for treatment, awareness and education, research and training. It also means that we expect all stakeholders involved in gambling, including operators and regulators, to adopt and implement best practices in reducing harms to all its customers, particularly those who are exhibiting problematic gambling behavior.

It seems fitting to be here today, on this last day of March, which is Problem Gambling Awareness Month. All over the country organizations like ours make special efforts throughout the month to get the word out that *problem gambling is an addiction, a public health issue and can be effectively treated*. We recognize that most Minnesotans can gamble without a problem. However, we must not forget the 250,000 Minnesota adults who exhibit problems with their gambling and the 56,000 who likely meet the clinical criteria for a gambling disorder. Furthermore, the Minnesota 2019 Student Survey revealed that 10,000 high school students show signs of problem gambling. You should also know that for every one gambler, there are seven to ten others who suffer harms because of their loved one's gambling.

If this bill passes, this will be the largest expansion of gambling this state has seen in decades. As such, it is imperative that Minnesota keep up with the vast changes

occurring in the gaming industry, prevention and treatment arenas. Unfortunately, Minnesota lags behind many states and needs to significantly reform its problem gambling program, which MNAPG will seek under separate legislation.

My objective today is to remind you that gambling disorder is a real addiction. It's not due to a moral failing or a lack of willpower. It is just as serious as an alcohol or drug addiction and deserves to be treated equitably with other substance use disorders. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders recognizes that gambling disorder is a peer addiction to substance use disorder. Yet, in the almost 10 years this has been recognized as such, Minnesota has continued to silo this addiction, ignoring the fact that is a common co-occurring addiction, and individuals may also have depression, ADHD or anxiety. It has the highest suicide rate of any addiction, yet it didn't warrant a mention in the state's suicide prevention plan or inclusion in prevention materials we teach in schools. We are only fooling ourselves by ignoring or downplaying the impact that this addiction has on some of our citizens. And, as more gambling is accessible through electronic means, there's a greater likelihood that problematic behavior will increase if the state does not adopt, implement and enforce practices that help to reduce harm to all players.

As we have reviewed the bill before you, there are several positive inclusions.

1. Funding. Providing 40% of sports betting tax revenue towards problem gambling programs. This will provide much needed funds to expand education and awareness, prevention, training and treatment.
2. Self-exclusion program. We are pleased to have the self-exclusion program called out in legislation. Ideally, MNAPG would like to see all operators participate in a comprehensive state-wide one stop self-exclusion program, which would make it easier to self-exclude and harder to be reinstated.
3. The promise to raise the age to 21 will help to prevent high school seniors from accessing regulated gambling sites on their phones.
4. Young men ages 18-35 are particularly vulnerable to taking risks in all aspects of their lives and gambling is no exception. We applaud the inclusion of the study in HF 167 to examine the behaviors and experiences of this cohort. Its findings will provide much needed information and will enable

those of us who work in the prevention field to design programs that can help to reduce the harms experienced.

5. Providing education and support to youth sports will promote the many values and benefits of team sports. Conversations regarding the integrity of the game must include conversations related to gambling. By providing prevention messaging to young athletes, they'll have a foundational understanding of the harms that can occur with gambling and who they can turn to if they need help. Gambling prevention education is absent from middle school and high school prevention curriculum. Including it here would be a helpful start.

Areas we would like to see additional language:

6. The section on rulemaking includes the *addition of appropriate standards and practices to prevent and address compulsive and problem gambling*. MNAPG would prefer to see more specific language built into the bill and will actively participate in the rulemaking process to include specific practices requiring operators to implement responsible gaming programs. These programs should include comprehensive employee training, access to self-exclusion programs, ability to set limits on time and money spent on betting, and specific requirements for the inclusion of help/prevention messages in external marketing.
7. Research. Gambling disorder continues to be treated differently from substance use disorder yet is classified as a peer addiction. There are no federal dollars to fund research. Each state must decide whether to support such efforts. MNAPG believes there should be support for regularly scheduled studies to monitor the impacts of gambling on players and to be able to use the data to support evidence-based mitigation efforts. We don't seek individual data, but would like aggregate data of player's behaviors and experiences made available to universities and nonprofit research entities. By prohibiting access to such data, the hands of those who work in the prevention and treatment fields are tied.

I realize this is the tax committee and human frailties are not typical conversations. However, I would ask that as you consider this legislation and any other gambling expansion bills that you take the time to understand the real harms players can experience with their gambling. Is Minnesota doing all that it can to minimize the

risks involved? MNAPG is not promoting prohibition; we know many Minnesotans like to gamble and do so without issue. But for those who develop an addiction, we need you to consider them and their families with compassion, not judgement. No one chooses to become addicted to anything. As a state we are endowed to protect our vulnerable citizens. Establishing an appropriate level of funding for treatment, prevention, research and training is imperative, along with regulatory and operator best practices. It's the right thing to do.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.