



Testimony of Susan Sheridan Tucker  
Executive Director of Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling  
HR 2000 Lawful Sports Betting  
State House Human Services Finance Committee  
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Chair Noor and Members of the Committee,

Good afternoon, I'm Susan Sheridan Tucker, Executive Director of Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling (MNAPG). I appreciate this opportunity to share with the committee a little about the work that we do in support of those negatively impacted by problem gambling and why it is so important to increase the funding.

MNAPG is a tax-exempt, non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of those affected by problem gambling through advocacy, education, training and research. We have been in existence since 2001 and we are the state affiliate to the National Council on Problem Gambling. I'm in my second term on the National Board and am currently the board president.

We maintain a neutral position on legalizing gambling; however, we fully support comprehensive consumer protections for all who choose to gamble. We also advocate increasing the funding for problem gambling/gambling disorder services. We are uniquely qualified to address the numerous issues relating to problem gambling. We help people connect to the resources they need to better understand the complexities of this addiction and for those ready and willing, we direct them to help.

I'm here today to let you know about the work we do. We are indirectly named in this legislation to receive a percentage of these funds and I want you to know how we currently spend our dollars.

We are a staff of 3 ½. Most of our work falls under awareness and education. We work hard to get the word out across that state that gambling addiction is real, treatment is available, it works and in Minnesota it's at no cost, if insurance doesn't cover it. And there are very few insurance policies that cover gambling addiction.

Our education and awareness efforts include:

- A **comprehensive website** full of resources for the gambler, concerned others and professionals
- Our **quarterly newsletter** addresses the most current trends as well as sharing a recovery story to provide hope, It has a **readership of over 10,000**.
- In the past 3 years we have been able to do some **targeted ads** in the Star Tribune, social media platforms and when accepted, publish op-ed pieces pertaining to problem gambling, gambling addiction and the recent attempts to legalize sport betting.
- We **communicate quarterly** with some of the **nineteen providers** in the state. We subsidize monthly meetings with an IGCCB BACC supervisor to enable the providers to discuss cases, seek advice from their peers and to build an opportunity for networking.
- **We have partnered with GamFin**, an organization that provides financial services to those who have been negatively impacted by their gambling losses. We subsidize the costs associated with the meetings with the financial advisor, the client and the counselor.

- Gambling counselors, ironically, do not receive any training around finances. This enables a financial advisor to work in concert with the counselor to address specific issues relating to their current situation – debt management, asset protection, consolidation of debt, transforming their relationship with money.
- We are **rolling out a high school toolkit for parents, teachers and coaches**. Currently no curriculum exists in the schools. Over the years we've asked to be included in the prevention materials warning students about drugs, alcohol and other substances. We've denied. We're going through the back door. The toolkit will address issues relating to youth gambling and youth gaming.
  - **MNAPG has subsidized research**, in 2019 an extensive study was conducted on the Minnesota **Lao community** and their gambling prevalence.
  - We conducted a **"Positive Play"** study which examined four specific criteria of gambling in a responsible manner – Honesty & Control, Precommitment, Gambling Literary and Personal Responsibility,
  - We **designed a normative feedback survey** to enable anyone who visits our website to see how their gambling compares with other Minnesotans. After completing the anonymous survey, the participant can print a report with the results and some helpful guidance based on their score on the PGSI.
  - **Every three years we subsidize the analysis of the Minnesota Student Survey**. Since the early 1990's we've been tracing the trends of student gambling. The last survey completed in 2022 indicates a rise in students participating in gambling and 6,000 high school students indicate they have issues with gambling.
  - **We run perennial awareness campaigns on sports betting** near the Super Bowl, we roll into March which is **Problem Gambling Awareness Month** and The NCAA Basketball tournament. We advocate for **National Problem Gambling Screening Day**, the second Tuesday of every month. Substance use disorder treatment centers nor mental health clinics screen for problem gambling, despite the fact that 65% of those with a gambling disorder also have another addiction or mental health issues. We partner with the MN Lottery in our **Gift Responsibly campaign** advising adults not to buy lottery tickets as gifts to minors.
  - We work with all communities that will invite us into their space. We have **translated many of our materials into Chinese, Hmong, Vietnamese, Somali and Spanish**. We've added a translation tool on our website for those who first language isn't English.
  - We produced a **thirty-second PSA** last June and will use most of our ad budget to air it during mid-March to mid-April.
  - I just recently hired a **full-time program manager** who will be able to do more definitive work with community organizations. I have a full-time community educator and as of last week, a part-time operations manager. We do use contractors for creative design, and ad placement.
  - We are **also rolling out a 6-hour online training for community influencers**. This will provide a baseline understanding of the addiction, let them know where and what resources are available and through subsequent events, we will build a wide network of individuals across the state that have developed some empathy around this addiction, will help to dispel the stigma and perhaps encourage people to seek treatment. It usually takes an individual 7-10 years to seek treatment and it's not always a linear progression.
  - **We table and or present to professional conferences** as well as community groups like the PTA, Rotary, health fairs, faith groups. We cover the state and typically attend over 30 events a year.

- **We host an annual conference**, bringing in speakers from across the country to address the leading trends in treatment, prevention and research.
- Prior to COVID **we tabled at the prisons during transition fairs**. There's a tremendous amount of gambling that goes on in our prisons, yet no services are available. We also lack a gambling diversion court. We offer a training to parole officers to screen for problem gambling among those who committed money related crimes.

We do all this with a typical budget of under \$1 million dollars. In the past couple of years, we've been able to spend a bit more on advertising only because of bookkeeping errors by DHS, which underreported our funding for several years. However, one-time projects scheduled for FY23 -FY25 will spend down those monies. Typically, we receive \$225,000 out of the lottery budget (a figure that has remained the same since 2006). In 2013, the state affiliate of NCPG was named in the charitable gambling bill as part of the arrangements to pay off the Viking stadium. Annually we receive a fluctuating amount of about \$600,00-\$700,000.

We have a long laundry list of projects we would like to implement, which would include a true statewide ad campaign to educate the public on gambling addiction, available resources and to help diminish the stigma associated with this addiction. We're concerned about our youth and believe many more efforts must be tried at the middle school and high schools, so we can really have a chance to reduce the number of people who may become addicted to gambling. We also know we need more bandwidth to do the work around the state in diverse communities. We are on the front lines on a daily basis, we have the expertise to help minimize gambling harm through expansion of education, research and prevention and we're passionate about our work.

Our hope today is that you realize the need and importance of increasing the funding for gambling disorder. We are in the midst of the largest expansion this country has seen in over 40 years. We're only fooling ourselves if you think that if this bill doesn't pass, Minnesota doesn't need to address the inequities in the problem gambling program. Whether you decide to legalize sports betting or not, people will engage in wagering. Technology has brought the sports book and the casino right into our hands. Legal or not, those susceptible to addiction will become addicted.

We are asking that you see this addiction. It impacts 250,000 Minnesotans, plus the 7-10 others who are impacted by the gambler. We also need to be talking about it. Pretending it doesn't exist or isn't as serious as other addictions will not serve us well.

We know there is massive discrimination regarding this addiction. According to the National Council on Problem Gambling, while substance abuse is seven times more prevalent than gambling addiction, it gets 338 times the funding. There's no federal funding available and we can't even get this state to change its references from compulsive gambling (an outdated term) to gambling disorder (the clinical term) and as a public health issue. (We've been participating in the state's suicide prevention plan task force after we realized there was no mention of gambling as a potential risk. Gamblers have the highest risk of suicide of any addiction.)

In 2013 the DSM-V recognized gambling disorder as a peer addiction to substance use disorder, yet even today 2024, the discrepancies in the level of services continues despite pleas to DHS. Additionally, there is no standard of care that's been articulated for treatment providers or for training. DHS has been lax in paying attention to the fast changes occurring in the gaming industry and I don't believe Minnesota is prepared to handle what is already happening on college campuses and elsewhere among young adults.

Gambling today is more sophisticated, targeted and designed to keep players engaged. For those who become addicted, the impacts can be devastating.

Minnesota has had blinders on when it comes to gambling addiction. We have let the old stereotypes of gamblers cloud our vision and we seemingly don't want to see this as the devastating addiction it can be for a small percentage of the population but touching every community. Gambling addiction discriminates against no one and anyone can fall prey to this addiction, if under the right circumstances. Do we need to wait to have a crisis on our hands before we're going to do the right thing and offer the appropriate level of services for those who are addicted to gambling and their families?

The Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling is committed to its mission, understands the issues and can respond quickly to the fast-changing landscape. We've been building trust among many communities that know us for our commitment to providing excellent and timely information. We strive to work collaboratively and to respond as best we can to a community's need.

Thank you for this opportunity.  
Susan Sheridan Tucker  
Executive Director