



**WRITTEN STATEMENT OF PATRICK WILLARD
DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND ADVOCACY
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON PROBLEM GAMBLING**

Statement regarding HB 940
Before the Budget and Taxation Committee – March 25, 2021

House Bill 940 would expand gambling in Maryland by legalizing sports wagering and establishing regulations for Fantasy and Sports Wagering under the Lottery and Gaming Control Commission. The National Council on Problem Gambling advocates for its affiliate and members in Maryland in addressing this legislation. These include the Maryland Council on Problem Gambling and the Maryland Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling.

NCPG is a nonprofit organization, founded in 1972, that leads state and national stakeholders in the development of comprehensive policy and programs for all those affected by problem gambling, serves as the national advocate for programs and services to assist problem gamblers and their families, and works to improve health and wellness by reducing the personal, social and economic costs of problem gambling. NCPG is neutral in our opinion of the legalization and expansion of various forms of gambling; excepting that expansions must include funding for research, help and prevention programs, treatment, recovery services, and requirements for regulations to help and protect those affected by problem gambling.

Our concerns regarding HB 940 relate to the need for additional funding for these treatments and services as Maryland expands gambling. As a principle of responsible sports betting legislation, NCPG recommends that one percent of gaming revenue go toward activities and treatment for problem gamblers including research, education and outreach.

Currently Maryland is providing 0.3 percent of total casino gaming revenues, according to figures provided by the Maryland Lottery and Gaming Commission to the House Ways and Means Committee.

The current funding for Maryland's Problem Gambling Fund is tied to an assessment on casinos based on the number of electronic gaming devices and table games. In order to achieve a balance in funding for the problem gambling services, there should be an assessment on sports wagering licensees in order to meet the new requirements for problem gambling programs related to sports wagering. We recommend such an assessment should be equal to one percent of the estimated gross revenue of sports wagering.

House Bill 940 specifically adds the responsibility to the Problem Gambling Fund through the Department of Health to:

(IV) DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT FREE OR REDUCED COST PROBLEM GAMBLING TREATMENT AND PREVENTION PROGRAMS TARGETED AT INDIVIDUALS WITH PROBLEM GAMBLING ISSUES RELATED TO SPORTS WAGERING, PARTICIPATION IN FANTASY COMPETITIONS, AND OTHER FORMS OF WAGERING, WHETHER LEGAL OR ILLEGAL, CONDUCTED IN THE STATE OR THROUGH ONLINE MEANS.

While the legislation now designates that certain unclaimed prizes from sports betting wagers will be distributed to the Problem Gambling Fund, such funding does not represent dedicated funds that can be relied upon for the treatment and prevention programs needed to address a new population of bettors making wagers online rather than at a racetrack or in a casino.

In addition, Maryland should now expand its research on problem gambling, with an emphasis on sports wagering and fantasy competitions. A great deal is to be learned about the ways to address mobile and online betting and its impact on gambling disorders. Maryland is in a unique position to see how gamblers and communities adapt to the new options and develop policies to protect consumers and families in the future. HB 940 should include language to launch this research and set standards for reporting periodic findings.

The National Council on Problem Gambling operates the National Problem Gambling Helpline Network (1-800-522-4700). The network is a single national access point to local resources for those seeking help for a gambling problem. The network consists of 28 call centers which provide resources and referrals for all 50 states, Canada and the US Virgin Islands. Help is available 24/7 and is 100% confidential. These features enable those who are gambling online or on their mobile phone to access help the same way that they play. One call, text or chat will get you to problem gambling help anywhere in the U.S. 24/7/365.

We know illegal gambling including sports betting occurs across Maryland. Legalization will likely increase availability and acceptability of sports gambling and thus increase participation, which may lead to more gambling problems. We also know from research that Maryland has a high rate of problem gambling which makes it critical that the new effort include resources to address gambling addiction.

These recommendations, if implemented, will provide badly needed help to bolster the existing problem gambling safety net prior to the onset of expanded gaming. Together with all stakeholders who will profit from sports betting our challenge is to implement measures to reduce that harm as much as possible even as sports gambling expands across the nation.