

Testimony in Support of SB 363

Public High Schools – Health Education – Gambling Dangers and Addiction – February 9, 2022

Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the committee:

This letter is in support of SB363, which lays out an educational plan on gambling and gambling addiction for high school students. Specifically, SB363 requires the State Department of Education to collaborate with appropriate state agencies and create an educational curriculum for gambling and gambling addiction to be given to public high school students. Additionally, the bill gives local boards the ability to implement this curriculum in public schools so that every student may have access to the gambling education at least once in grades 9 through 12. The implementation of this bill is crucial in reducing problem gambling and gambling addiction in Maryland. By offering these educational resources as early as age 14, teenagers can begin to form healthier practices regarding gambling that can continue into adulthood. This Bill can only positively affect the rate of problem gambling and gambling addiction in both youth and adults.

CURRENTLY YOUTH GAMBLING IS A STATEWIDE ISSUE.

In a 2018 study of Maryland counties, between 17% and 29% of high school students had reported to gamble at least once in the past year. On the high end, 29% of reporting Baltimore City high school students had gambled in the last year. Baltimore City was followed by Prince George’s County with 26% of students reporting that they had gambled.¹ Even more alarming, of those students reporting they had gambled in the last year, between 3.5% and 7.9% had reported to frequent gambling of 10 or more times a year. Again, Baltimore City leads the counties in this problematic trend at 7.9% and is followed by Wicomico County at 6.6% of students reporting to have frequently gambled.² Lastly, the data from this study shows the need for SB363 because the disparity of student gambling grew as age increased. For the state as a whole, the percentage of students gambling at 15 or younger increases from 21.6% to 30.1% for students 18 and over. This trend is similar in 14 of the Maryland counties.³ Given the trends that this data demonstrates, there is a need for intervention among Maryland youth in order to alleviate the issue of youth problem gambling and addiction.

¹ YRBS Report, 2018.

² YRBS Report, 2018.

³ YRBS Report, 2018.

IMPLEMENTING AN EDUCATIONAL SCHEME CAN POSITIVELY AFFECT YOUTH GAMBLING

Due to the findings in the 2018 report, the Maryland Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling collaborated with the Center for School Mental Health and administered the MD-Smart Choices Problem Gambling Prevention Program. This program was designed to provide students with information about gambling, which included factors that may contribute to the development of problem gambling. The program focuses on the risks associated with gambling and emphasizes informed decision making, with the goal of preventing behaviors which may lead to gambling disorders. To reach this goal, the curriculum has two main focuses. First, to help students define gambling and differentiate between games of skill and games of luck. Second, the focus is to help students make positive choices using a decision-making mode. An additional significant feature of this program is that it was implemented in schools that were in urban areas with a significant minority population of students, which is the demographic that is most vulnerable to problem gambling and addiction.⁴

When looking at the outcomes of this program, the findings were reassuringly positive. First, trends across school years show that student knowledge of skill and luck increased significantly. Additionally, the analysis of the program demonstrated significant increases in participant understanding of consequences associated with gambling. Secondly, after going through the program, students were able to distinguish between games of luck and games of skill, as well as the potential outcomes of both types of games. Third, the participant outcomes were also positive. The vast majority of students having gone through the program stated they had never gambled, and those who did stated that they gambled in a home setting within the \$10-\$19 range.⁵ Thus, the implementation of this program demonstrates the positive effects of gambling education regarding the issue of youth problem gambling and addiction.

⁴ MD Smart Choices Report, 2018.

⁵ MD Smart Choices Report, 2018.

CONCLUSION

Currently, the gambling industry in Maryland is growing and becoming more prevalent. With the help of SB363, Maryland's youth can be properly educated about problem gambling and addiction, which in return will set them up with the resources needed to have healthy gambling practices now and in the future. For these reasons, the Maryland Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling supports Senate Bill 363 and urges a favorable vote.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mary Drexler". The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized, with a large initial "M" and "D".

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