



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

Statement before  
the Ohio State Senate Select Committee on Gaming – March 31, 2021

Chairman Schuring, Vice Chair Manning and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony as an interested party regarding sports gaming and e-bingo. The National Council on Problem Gambling advocates on behalf of our state affiliate chapter and other members in Ohio in addressing proposals to expand gambling in Ohio. These include the Problem Gambling Network of Ohio which also provided testimony to the committee .

Let me applaud the extensive hearings conducted by the committee over the last two months. Your interest in understanding the issues and crafting legislation that will meet the needs and interests of the people of Ohio is commendable.

You have heard from those who have an interest in operating sports betting and other gambling programs in the state. They hope to be the winners of contracts and licenses that will involve millions of dollars in wagers and new revenue for Ohio. NCPG comes to speak for those who will not be winners whatever gambling venues are made legal. Instead, we speak for the problem gamblers, who struggle with an addiction that requires attention in the legislation and regulation of the operators and vendors of new gambling options.

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.

NCPG adopted principles for sports betting legislation after the Supreme Court decision to allow states to legalize wagers on sporting events. We believe any legislation on sports gambling should meet the following benchmarks:

- Ensure that any expansion of sports gambling includes dedicated funds to prevent and treat gambling addiction.
- Require sports betting operators to implement responsible gaming programs which include comprehensive employee training, self-exclusion, ability to set limits on time

and money spent betting, specific requirements for the inclusion of help/prevention messages in external marketing.

- Assign a regulatory agency to enforce the regulations and requirements that are enacted.
- Conduct surveys of the prevalence of gambling addiction prior to expansion and at regular periods thereafter in order to monitor impacts of legalized sports betting and have data that will support evidence-based mitigation efforts.
- Funding and promotion of a helpline to address problem gambling is critical to making people aware of the resources and treatment available.

In addition, Ohio should now expand its research on problem gambling, with more 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. Ohio 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. In Ohio, past surveys conducted for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services offer a baseline that may be used to conduct deeper research into sports betting. Those surveys showed that people engaged in sports wagers were at greater risk of problem gambling, a conclusion echoed in NCPG's own national research that found gamblers who bet sports weekly or more often had 5 times as many signs of gambling problems as other gamblers.

One area of focus should be in payment processing as a way to set guardrails to assist bettors. This means limit setting should be the default option, and play should stop once a limit is reached. Other principles that should be adopted include:

- Operators should encourage and even incentivize the player to set payment limits.
- Players should have the option of setting daily, weekly or monthly limits on the size of deposits.
- Players should be able to lower limits immediately.
- Players may request increases in or removal of their limits.
- After a player reaches a limit and play is stopped and any request for increase or removal is made, there will be an additional delay of at least 24 hours. The player must reconfirm their request for the limit to be changed.
- Limits should be periodically reviewed, with payments history and analysis of current deposits and spending projected on an annual basis

Even with responsible gambling measures by operators and vendors, there will be those who exceed their limits and put their funds and health at risk. This is why treatment and addiction services are needed. Those states with the greatest history in dealing with problem gambling are now setting aside up to 5 percent of revenues for treatment, prevention awareness and other services.

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 all the state problem gambling helplines, just like 911 is for police emergencies. We encourage Ohio to allow operators to promote the National Helpline alongside the state helpline number. The National Number instantly and automatically connects callers from Ohio to the Ohio problem gambling helpline and does the same in every other state. So no matter where someone sees the National Helpline, whether on TV, internet, billboard or flyer, they are able to reach help for their area with one call. One call, text or chat will get you to problem gambling help anywhere in the U.S. 24/7/365. Those who are gambling online or on their mobile phone must be able to access help the same way that they play.

We know illegal gambling including sports betting occurs across Ohio. 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 Ohio 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 gambling. 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.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please feel free to reach out to the National Council on Problem Gambling for any assistance in research or best practices on gambling addiction treatment and programs.