

NORTH DAKOTA INTERIM LEGISLATURE

TAXATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday, July 15, 2020

Committee Members, my name is Lisa Vig. I am the Director of Gamblers Choice, a program of Lutheran Social Services of ND. I have been providing administrative duties and direct counseling services to those who are struggling with gambling addictions for 30 years.

We have had a collaborative relationship with the lottery since the lottery was legalized in **2002**. A direct deposit is made into the Compulsive Gambling Prevention and Treatment Fund. The ND Tribal Casinos have been voluntary contributions since the mid **1990's** and the ND Racing Commission has been doing the same since **2014**.

Charitable Gambling has a long and rich history in North Dakota providing revenue for the State's General Fund as well as supporting charitable work round the State since **1977**. To date, we have not yet had a formalized way to designate funds from charitable gambling activities to assist those struggling with addiction issues. Now is the time.

The addition of e-tab machines has brought a new level of excitement and enjoyment for most social and recreational gamblers. However, the machines have also brought a level of danger to those who are vulnerable to, or, are already struggling with gambling addictions. The local availability and accessibility, rapid play, and advertised high payouts have led to a dangerous combination for some of our ND residents.

We have new individuals coming forward looking for treatment, counsel and guidance after identifying significant life disruptions and complications as a result of their involvement with e-tab machines. **Greg** is a vulnerable adult residing in Bismarck, who receives Social Security disability. He has been unable to purchase medication or food due to his gambling activity at local establishments. **Brent** is a resident of Fargo, who has been laid off from the hospitality industry due to Covid. He spent \$3000 of his unemployment benefits at establishments in downtown Fargo as soon as bars re-opened. **Brandon** is a 29 year- old carpenter who was in the process of taking over his father's cabinetry business in Fargo but has lost \$100,000 on the e-tab machines in the past year. He is filing bankruptcy and working hard to get several of his carpentry tools out of local pawn shops, who are charging \$600 per week in interest.

Setting aside funds from charitable gambling revenue is more critical than ever. Responsible gambling campaigns and educational efforts are needed to help the citizens of ND practice safe and responsible gambling activity. For those who are gambling problematically, counselors, support groups and treatment resources need to be as readily available as gambling opportunities. I look forward to collaborating on this plan with all concerned entities.

Thank you for your time today. Feel free to contact me for additional information at lvig@lssnd.org or 701-271-3279 or 701-793-7655.

Lisa Vig, LAC, ICGC

Gamblers Choice LSSND