

Psychiatry

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Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SB 322 – Public Schools – Health Education –
Gambling Dangers and Addiction – Letter of Support

Dear Chair Pinsky:

This letter is in support of SB322, which provides for instruction on the dangers of gambling and gambling addiction in grades 6 through 12. In general, students would begin receiving this education at 11 years of age. This is a critical time for a student to receive gambling education as the average age at which a child first gambles is 12 years old – younger than the average age for first use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. Studies have shown that children who are introduced to and begin gambling by age 12 are four times more likely to become problem gamblers; particularly African-American males. , That early introduction can be critical in the development of a gambling addiction.

Students are put in a better position to judge the potential dangers of gambling if they are taught that gambling is an occasional activity meant for entertainment only, not as a way to make money, and that there are certain risks and negative consequences associated with engaging in gambling activities. Education of this type is particularly important because despite being reasonably well-informed about the health risks involved with drugs, smoking, sex, and drinking, few have any information about gambling and its inherent risks. A statewide study of Oregon youth and their parents noted that “high proportions of parents (regardless of whether or not they gamble) believe that gambling is a harmless activity, that youth who gamble are unlikely to have problems in school, and that youth gambling is not associated with alcohol or drug use.” This misinformation is dangerous; while the majority of players may gamble only on occasion and just for fun, others will gamble excessively and develop serious problems.

A lack of understanding about the signs of problem gambling is part of the reason that youth are at risk. According to a study conducted by the International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-Risk Behaviors, 10-14% of youth ages 12-17 are at risk of developing a gambling addiction, which means that they already show signs of losing control over their gambling behavior. Approximately 4-5% of youth meet one or more criteria of having a gambling problem, and 4–8% of youth show signs of pathological gambling – considerably higher than rates of pathological gambling in the general adult population (1–3%).

Gambling is popular in society – consider fantasy football and scratch-off tickets. It's so popular, in fact, that in that same study, 60-80% of high school students reported having gambled for money during the past year. This bill will help youth understand the risks associated with gambling and allow for informed decision-making that can prevent behaviors which may lead to gambling disorder. For these reasons, I support this bill.

Sincerely,



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¹ Jacobs DF. Youth gambling in North America: Long-term trends and future prospects. In: Derevensky JL, Gupta R, editors. *Gambling Problems in Youth: Theoretical and Applied Perspectives*. New York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers; 2004. pp. 1–24.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2945873/#B5>

¹ knowtheodds.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NYC_PG_ebook_YouthGambling_052114.pdf

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2629630/>

¹ <https://preventionlane.org/youth-gambling-for-parents>