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HB17 Internet Gaming Authorization and Implementation

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members:

I am testifying against HB17 Internet Gaming Authorization and Implementation. I am a recognized leader and expert in disordered and problem gambling and providing gambling/gaming advocacy, public awareness, and assistance since 1993. I am the President-Emerita of the Maryland Council on Problem Gambling (MCPG), a 501-c-3 nonprofit in Maryland. Our grassroots efforts support community members across the State of Maryland. MCPG is also the vendor for the Faith Initiative through the Behavioral Health Administration and the University of Maryland Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling, and we have trained hundreds of faith and spiritual leaders on problem gambling as they are often "first responders." I advocate on behalf of both my private practice and the Maryland Council on Problem Gambling and speaking for the many voiceless persons caught up in risky gambling and their affected others (family, friends, employers, community members) who are so psychologically and financially overwhelmed that they cannot testify about the devastation from their gambling addiction.

While research documents that 85% of the general public gambled at some point in their lives and that 1-3% of the general public become addicted to gambling, the research reports are inaccurate. Why? Because persons who are caught up in addiction are not accessing clinical treatment which comprise research data. In my 30 years of problem gambling advocacy, leadership, and treatment, I can attest to devastation affecting communities, youth who access technology around the clock, older adults, and others looking for "fast money," and communities already challenged with health disparities and experiences of marginalization. These are consistent patterns in the state, U.S., and around the globe. We know that when gambling expands, "they will come." I-gaming expansion moves the boundaries of accessibility/availability. When people lose money gambling/gaming, they "chase" their losses and i-gaming results in 24-hour chasing. Financial and emotional distress also results in high suicidality and more family pain. Lost incomes and lost lives will generate unrecoverable losses to Maryland.

Finally, igaming will hurt our most vulnerable populations in the State of Maryland: our youth are already technologically plugged in and igaming **will** disrupt youth and emerging adults' futures **before** they begin. Additionally, our older adults-- many lacking incomes for medications, housing, and other important needs-- suffer. This bill may appear as a "solution" to state financial challenges. In the same way our state residents see gambling as the "solution" to their problems, the state will model what we reinforce in our public awareness efforts: Gambling is not a solution to resolving financial challenges. Please vote **unfavorable** to HB17. Thank you,

Sincerely,

Deborah G. Haskins (electronic signature)