

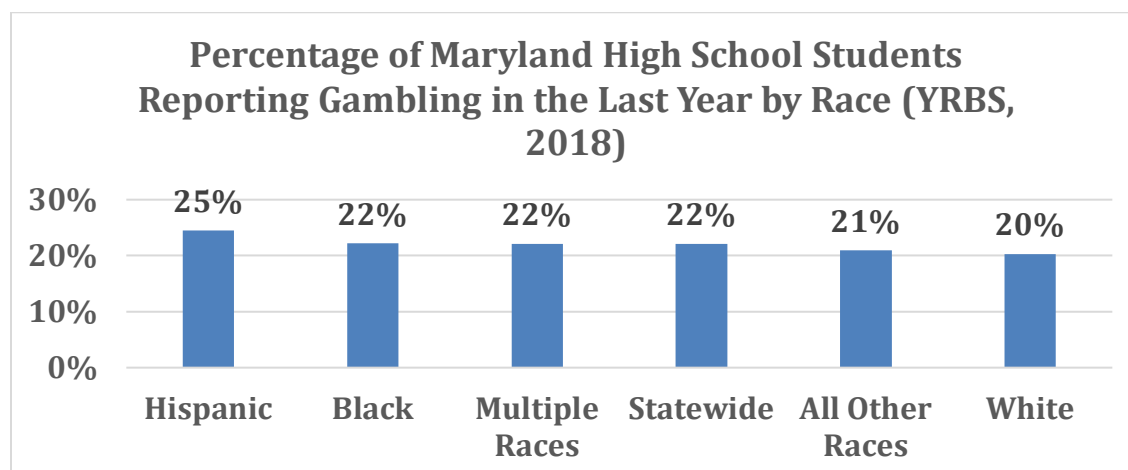
January 20, 2021

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

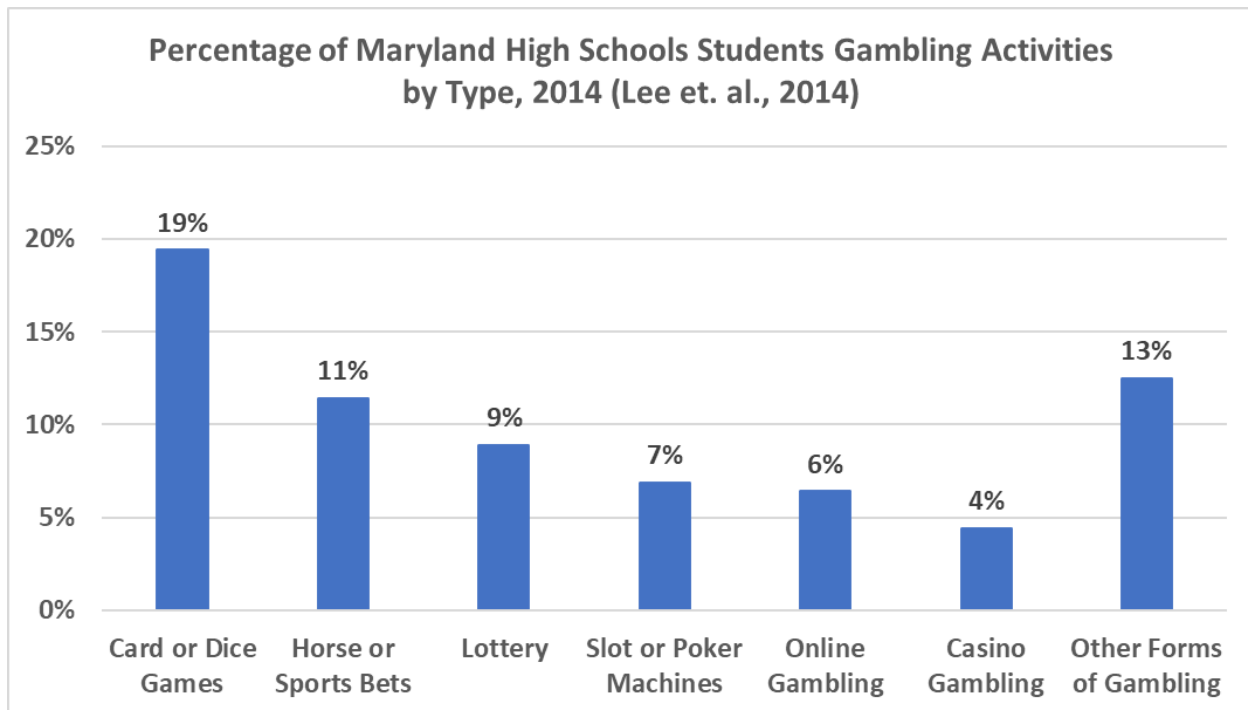
RE: SB 243 – Public High Schools – Health Education –  
Gambling Dangers and Addiction – Letter of Support

Dear Chair Pinsky and members of the Committee:

This letter is in support of SB243, which provides for instruction on the dangers of gambling and gambling addiction for students during grades 9 through 12. In general, students would be given the opportunity to receive this education beginning at 14 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.<sup>i</sup> 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.<sup>ii,iii</sup> Maryland is no exception; 33% of high school students have self-reported gambling in their lifetime. The most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows that 22% of high school students gambled in the last year.



In past studies, students have also reported the type of gambling activities in which they engage. Of note, 11% of Maryland high school students indicated they have engaged in sports betting before any consideration of legalization in Maryland. Students also reported engaging in online gambling, which continues to gain momentum.



Students should also be made aware of the link between gaming and gambling. According to the 2019 Evolution of Entertainment Study, 73% of Americans ages 2 and older play video games – an increase of 6 percentage points since June 2018.<sup>iv</sup> Notable increases in both engagement and spending have been seen amongst youth ages 2 to 17. The line between gaming and gambling is ever blurring. For example, “social casinos” are video games that are basically a simulation of gambling: you can spend real money in them, and the only thing that stops them from being regulated as proper gambling is that winnings cannot be converted into cash. It’s clear to see the risk that this activity poses in normalizing gambling activities for youth, and its future public health implications.

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. 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, the Maryland Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling supports this bill.

Sincerely,



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<sup>i</sup> 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.

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.knowtheodds.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NYCPG\\_ebook\\_YouthGambling\\_052114.pdf](https://www.knowtheodds.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NYCPG_ebook_YouthGambling_052114.pdf)

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

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.npd.com/wps/portal/npd/us/news/press-releases/2019/according-to-the-npd-group--73-percent-of-u-s--consumers-play-video-games/#:~:text=Port%20Washington%2C%20NY%2C%20October%208,percentage%20points%20since%20June%202018.>