

MARYLAND PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY



February 10, 2025

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The Honorable Brian Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support Senate Bill 310: Education - Youth Suicide Prevention School Program - Revisions

Dear Chairman Feldman and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1100 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

The MPS and WPS supports SB 310. This bill would alter the requirements of the Youth Suicide Prevention School Program to increase pupil awareness of the relationship between gambling and youth suicide. Gambling addiction, often referred to as compulsive or pathological gambling, is a severe mental health condition characterized by an uncontrollable urge to gamble despite the negative consequences it brings. Unlike casual gambling, where individuals may indulge for fun or entertainment, addiction creates a cycle of compulsive behavior that can have devastating effects on a person's life. These effects can manifest in financial ruin, relationship breakdowns, and a profound sense of despair. Perhaps the most alarming consequence of gambling addiction is its link to an increased risk of suicide. As individuals lose control over their gambling habits, they may face overwhelming guilt, hopelessness, and isolation, leading them down a dangerous path. Addressing gambling addiction requires a multi-faceted approach, encompassing therapy, support networks, and societal awareness to prevent these tragic outcomes.

Gambling disorder has a strong and well-documented relationship with suicide, showing significantly elevated risks compared to the general population. Problem gamblers are 3-15 times more likely to attempt suicide than the general population. The statistics are particularly concerning:

- 21.2% of problem gamblers experience suicidal thoughts compared to 11.2% in controls⁵
- Among Gamblers Anonymous members, 12-18% have attempted suicide, and 80% reported wanting to die³
- Young men with problem gambling have 9.0 times higher odds of attempted suicide, while young women have 4.9 times higher odds⁵

Contributing Factors

- Problem gambling leads to severe mental health consequences, including depression (affecting 70-76% of pathological gamblers), anxiety, and stress-related disorders³⁴. The cycle of gambling creates an emotional rollercoaster, with intense highs from anticipated wins followed by devastating lows from losses². Indebtedness and shame are particularly strong factors linking gambling disorder to suicidality⁷.
- Treatment-seeking rates remain concerningly low, with only 8% of gamblers asking for help, typically only when experiencing severe psychological distress⁷.

For these reasons, MPS supports SB310. If you have any questions regarding this testimony, please contact MPS lobbyist, Lisa Harris Jones at lisa.jones@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society
Legislative Action Committee