



## **SB884 - Internet Poker Authorization and Regulation Act of 2026**

Position: Information Only  
Hearing Date: March 11, 2026  
Committee: Budget & Taxation

**The Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF)** is a statewide nonprofit organization that provides family peer support services at no cost to families who have a child or other loved one with a mental health, substance use, or problem gambling disorder. As experienced caregivers, we provide support, guidance, and hope to people who love or care for someone with a behavioral health challenge and advocate to improve the systems they rely on.

The National Survey on Gambling Attitudes and Gambling Experiences found that one of the greatest predictors of risk for developing a problem gambling disorder was participation in online gambling<sup>1</sup>. Low barrier access to online gaming and gambling platforms can lead to the development of gambling disorders in anyone though young adults, particularly men of color, are at the highest risk.<sup>2</sup>

As the State explores options to legalize various types of online gaming for Marylanders, it is crucial to consider the cost of treatment and resources for people who develop gambling disorders as a result. Treating gambling disorders is already challenging. Gambling is not widely viewed as a behavioral health disorder. People tend to focus on the financial impact of gambling which is only a symptom of the larger problem of addiction. When people do seek help, they find few treatment options that specifically address problem gambling, long waiting lists to access services, and prohibitive costs that make treatment inaccessible. People with gambling challenges may have strained relationships with family and friends because of their gambling behavior, leaving them isolated without crucial support.

Individuals with addictions have far better outcomes when they are surrounded by a strong, supportive network of people they can rely on, who understand their challenges, and are committed to helping them in their recovery. It's crucial that as resources are developed to treat gambling challenges, families are not forgotten. Family members are key to a person's recovery, but they need support too. They may not understand that their loved one's disorder is a disease that requires treatment. They may harbor resentment from the impact their loved one's gambling has had on them. They simply may not know how to help. Peer support programs for individuals with problem gambling challenges are highly successful and similar family peer services are just as

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncpgambling.org/training/ngage-survey/ngage-3/>

<sup>2</sup> Moreira D, Azeredo A, Dias P. Risk Factors for Gambling Disorder: A Systematic Review. *J Gambl Stud.* 2023 Jun;39(2):483-511. doi: 10.1007/s10899-023-10195-1. Epub 2023 Mar 8. PMID: 36884150; PMCID: PMC9994414.



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valuable. Problem gambling challenges impact social systems, not just individuals. A holistic approach is required. If the families surrounding the person with the gambling disorder are supported, provided with resources, and educated about their loved one's disorder, then the effectiveness of other interventions and strategies are reinforced and the chances of success are greater.

If internet poker is legalized in Maryland, MCF strongly urges a holistic approach to funding prevention and early intervention strategies that focus on providing evidence-based support to people with gambling challenges as well as their families.

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