



HB518 - Gaming - Problem Gambling and College Athlete Protections

Position: Support with Amendment
Hearing Date: March 24, 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.

MCF offers peer support to young adults with problem gambling challenges and family support to their families. We support the provisions in HB518 because they will provide critical resources and tools to people who have problem gambling challenges and their families.

Voluntary exclusions programs (VEP) offer people a way to manage their gambling behaviors, decrease co-occurring depression and anxiety, and improve relationships with friends and family. Connecting people using VEPs to resources from the Center for Excellence on Problem Gambling (CEPG) is crucial to their ongoing success though MCF believes that people should be able to opt in to the program vs opting out. Opting in allows the person to give their specific consent to have their contact information shared thereby strengthening their commitment to their recovery and giving them agency over their choices. In the words of our Young Adult Peer Specialist, "Individuals should have the choice as to whether they can handle resources and if they are ready for that in their current state; self-exclusion is already a big enough step as is. In my lived experience, I was ready to receive that sort of information to help in my recovery, but I also know that others are not." In addition, any opportunity to provide people with information about CEPG and access to a peer prior to signing their voluntary exclusion would help them make informed decisions about the resources and options available to them.

MCF supports the prohibition on player proposition bets for collegiate sports and athletic events. As recently as January 2026, organizations such as the NCAA have called for state gambling commissions to eliminate these and other high risks bets. Such bets can be influenced by a single player or official or insider information about a specific player and can lead to harassment of student athletes when bettors lose money. This has been particularly dangerous for female college athletes.

Finally, prohibiting individuals under the age of 21 from engaging in fantasy sports competitions is a crucial step to helping young people avoid developing problem gambling disorders. These competitions may seem harmless, but to the developing brains of adolescents and young adults, they can present significant risks including addiction, financial loss, depression, and anxiety. Fantasy competitions can introduce young people to other forms of gambling behavior at a young age when critical thinking skills required to make informed choices have not yet fully developed.

MCF is in support of measures that continue to address the dangers posed by gaming and sports wagering among all people, but particularly youth and young adults. These dangers



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result in behavioral health challenges that impact individuals, families, and communities and create additional stressors on our behavioral healthcare system.

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