**March Madness can be “Maddening” for Problem Gamblers and Employers**

HAMILTON, NEW JERSEY – March 14, 2016 - Some call it the most exciting 3 weeks of sports of the year. It is the chance to root on the old alma mater, or a favorite college; a chance to follow a Cinderella story as a small school goes head to head with a national powerhouse. It is an opportunity to fill the work day with water cooler banter or research on who to select to go to the championship game. On Monday, March 14, President Obama filled out his NCAA ‘Final Four’ bracket live on ESPN kicking off a month of increased sports betting across the nation. While it can definitely become a betting frenzy for those who are familiar with the teams, even those who don’t follow college basketball get caught up in the excitement.

The American Gaming Association anticipated last year that 70 million Americans would fill out brackets wagering more than $2 billion during the basketball tournament in office pools alone. Additionally, it is anticipated that over $9 billion will be wagered on Individual games of which only about $250 million would be done legally through Las Vegas sportsbooks. Employers also feel the burden as a study done by Challenger, Gray, and Christmas last year found that “companies stand to lose at least $1.2 billion for every unproductive work hour during the first week of the tournament alone.”

For most people, March Madness is a fun activity. But for some who like to gamble, it is a riskier activity, especially if gambling has begun to interfere with other aspects of their life. It could be the event that pushes them from social gambling into problem gambling, or acts as a trigger back to a different drug of choice. For those who are already experiencing problems, it can push them deeper into that financial, spiritual, moral and emotional hole.

The Council on Compulsive Gambling of NJ offers some questions that gamblers can ask themselves, before or while participating in March Madness, to see if they might be at risk:

* Has ‘fan fever’ been replaced by ‘gambling fever’?
* Is betting on the game more interesting to you than enjoying the game?
* Are you controlling gambling, or is gambling controlling you?
* Are you one of the roughly 6 million Americans whose relationships, well-being and finances are damaged by out of control gambling?

The Council reminds gamblers, as well as their families and friends, that support, treatment, and hope is available to anyone who has concerns or is looking for more information. The Council’s helpline can direct callers to counseling, self-help meetings, and other resources that can help them overcome this addiction. It’s as simple as calling 1-800-GAMBLER or texting ‘800GAMBLER’ to 53342 and it’s free and confidential. For additional information, please contact Neva Pryor Executive Director of the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, 609-588-5515, neva@800gambler.org.

**About The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, Inc.**

*The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, Inc. is a private non-profit organization that provides information, education and referral services for people affected by a gambling problem. The Council's mission is to educate the public to the fact that disordered gambling is a treatable illness. The Council's 1-800-GAMBLER® Helpline and website* [*www.800gambler.org*](http://www.800gambler.org) *have been resources for many thousands of people who are compulsive gamblers and recovering from compulsive gambling, as well as their friends and families. The 1-800-GAMBLER® helpline is free and confidential, and it is available 24 hours a day throughout much of the U.S.*