

# The Council Connection

Council on Compulsive Gambling of NJ

## 800-GAMBLER®

April 2024



The New Jersey Casino Control Commission recognized the March observance of Problem Gambling Awareness Month by presenting a Resolution to the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey. Taking part in the March 13 ceremony are: (from left) Division of Gaming Enforcement Interim Director Mary Jo Flaherty, Casino Association of New Jersey President Mark Giannantonio, Casino Control Commissioner Joyce Mollineaux, Commission Chairman James T. Plousis, Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey Executive Director Felicia Grondin, Deputy Attorney General Jamie McKelvey, Vice Chair Alisa Cooper, and Office of the Governor Associate Counsel Alexis Franklin.

### *A Message from the Executive Director*

## **CCGNJ Confronts Problem Gambling Surge with Record PGAM Outreach, Advocacy and Webinars**

The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ) marked the March observance of Problem Gambling Awareness Month (PGAM) under the banner of "Betting on Change: Confronting the Surge in Problem Gambling." The Council will carry this theme through to its

annual conference, set to take place in late September. The CCGNJ's many PGAM events centered on the mounting issues arising from the gambling culture that emerged in New Jersey in the years since online casino and sports betting were legalized.

Among the month's highlights were Governor Phil Murphy issuing a Proclamation declaring March 2024 as Problem Gambling Awareness Month in New Jersey and a resolution presented to the Council by the Casino Control Commission during an Open Public Meeting in Atlantic City. Governor Murphy's Proclamation incorporated the Council's PGAM theme and the need to respond to the state's dramatic increase in problem gambling, a spike that is evidenced by the 277 percent climb in calls made to the Council's 800-GAMBLER Helpline since 2018.



Each March, the CCGNJ observes PGAM by heightening public awareness about problem gambling, an issue of growing concern in New Jersey and across the country. The Council has pressed for much more attention to be paid to the fallout from problem gambling, such as seniors losing their retirement savings or parents depleting their children's college fund, as well as a dramatic increase in underage betting; in the worst cases, problem gamblers contemplate suicide, having the highest rate of suicide ideation of all addictions (20 percent).

During PGAM, CCGNJ prioritized communications with the state's elected officials. We engaged in our annual meeting with the Governor's Office and undertook our yearly PGAM residency at the State House. On two busy legislative days, March 11 and March 14, we had a display at the State House and met with lawmakers and legislative aides to discuss areas of concern such as increased youth gambling, excessive and misleading advertising, and social media attacks on college athletes by losing bettors. Among the reforms the Council proposes is to create and promulgate a gambling warning label on online sites and bricks and mortar casinos, akin to the Surgeon General's warning on tobacco products, to alert the public to gambling's potential to become an addiction with devastating consequences.

The Council's month-long PGAM campaign included a record 141 presentations to nearly 1,500 attendees throughout the state, covering a host of gambling issues tailored to different demographics. In addition, Council staff presented a five-webinar series, with topics covering: "How the Prevention Paradox May Now Apply to all Gambling Harm;" "How Sports Gambling has Changed the Playing Field;" "Gambling: A Public Health Issue;" "12 Steps of Recovery in Gamblers Anonymous;" and "Maintaining and Restoring Relationships with a Problem Gambler."

With a successful PGAM now behind us, we look ahead to our annual conference - slated for September 20 in Princeton – and we look to continue our ongoing commitment to confront the surge in problem gambling.

**Felicia Grondin, MPA**  
**Executive Director**

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## March Madness Becoming Truly Maddening

In the 2024 edition of March Madness, the ballers vied with betting apps for top billing. The alliterative label for the season-ending basketball tournament dates back further than most might think, but the present incarnation bears little resemblance to its modest origins. The name for roundball's big dance was coined in 1939 to describe



the feverish fandom witnessed during the Illinois high school basketball playoffs. The NCAA tournament adopted the March Madness moniker in the 1980s and before long a phenomenon took hold. It captured the imagination of diehard fans and basketball know-nothings alike, all hoping their brackets would feature a few upsets to set their picks apart from others'. With sports gambling's legalization in 2018, however, the

madness of March has assumed a literal, unsettling connotation in which the money line is all and backing a team out of pure allegiance passe'.

Six years of legalized sports betting has utterly remade a once limited and relatively benign activity, spawning a mania marked by 24/7 online access to betting apps, an avalanche of ads and a steady diet of enticements. Last year, the American Gaming Association reported that 68 million Americans bet \$15.5 billion on the March tournament, and this year both the number of bettors and the handle (total wagers) will surely surpass the 2023 figures.

Fallout from sports betting's transformation is evident in the calls made to the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey's 800-GAMBLER Helpline. Since 2018, the Helpline has seen an increase in calls of 277 percent. It is not only the volume of calls but who is placing them that has changed significantly: Many more calls are made by young men, or from their worried parents; in the past five years, calls from 18-24-year-olds doubled, while calls from those between 25 and 35 rose by 17 percent.

The surge in betting on college basketball and other college sports has produced some disturbing acts by bettors. One of the more troubling examples occurs when losing bettors harass and even threaten college athletes on social media and elsewhere, alleging they took bribes and impacted the outcome. New Jersey's Office of the Attorney General has responded to these posts with a letter to all New Jersey college athletic directors alerting them to this issue and created a website to connect colleges with the New Jersey State Police to report cases of bettors menacing college athletes or instances of athletes being approached about throwing a game or shaving points.

Another manifestation of the gambling mania pervading the sports environment is found in broadcasts. Throughout virtually every game aired, as well as on many sports talk shows, one hears content about the point spread, the odds, over/under and other betting-centric commentary. Furthermore, the money line and point spread constantly crawl across the bottom of television screens throughout games.

The phrase March Madness was inspired by the joyful fanaticism of fans in one midwestern state rooting for high school athletes. It became a national craze with occasional Cinderella wins or near-misses by unheralded colleges spurring delight at the prospect of catching lightning in a bottle. In the half-decade since sports gambling was legalized, the exuberance roused by a tournament run by an underdog has become inseparable from the payout, and the taint of suspicion looms over almost every game. This pervasive sports betting "madness" has produced an outbreak of crushing losses for athletes and fans alike.

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## **Senator's Trio of Gambling Bills Encompasses Betting App Tax Increase, Operator Civil Liability, and Gaming as Betting Gateway**

Problem Gambling Awareness Month in New Jersey received a legislative lift with the introduction of three gambling-related measures.

State Senator John McKeon (D-27) introduced the package of bills in mid-March aiming to strengthen protections for youth, children as well as problem gamblers, and increase state tax revenue generated by online casinos and sports betting apps. The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ) has lent its full support to the two protection measures, while it conditions its endorsement for the proposed tax increase on having the bill explicitly allocate some of the new tax revenue to the Council to help meet the growing need for its prevention and treatment services.



Sen. McKeon's first proposal, S-3062, would prohibit casinos from using non-wagering casino games to encourage future gambling. With the recent boom in online gambling, it has become increasingly common for casinos to offer games on mobile applications that provide non-monetary rewards while simulating the act of betting. These games, which are widely played by youth, can be a gateway to gambling.

"Apps run by casinos that replicate the experience of playing real casino games take advantage of children to get them hooked at a young age so they can make monetary bets in the future," said Sen. McKeon (*pictured*). "The National Council on Problem Gambling reports that children and teens are at a higher risk for gambling addiction than adults, and those who start gambling at a young age are more likely to develop a problem. We must protect our kids from these predatory practices and hold casinos accountable to prevent the next generation from falling victim to the devastating consequences of compulsive gambling."

The second bill in the package, S-3063, seeks to protect people struggling with gambling addiction by permitting a civil liability against casinos and simulcast facilities for reckless indifference or intentional misconduct for failing to withhold gaming privileges from participants enrolled in the New Jersey Casino Self-Exclusion Program. The New Jersey Casino Gambling Self-Exclusion Program allows individuals to voluntarily exclude themselves from gambling in all Atlantic City casinos and internet gaming activities.

"Under current law, casinos are free from repercussions even if they knowingly enable a person's gambling addiction," said Sen. McKeon, who is vice chairman of the Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism & Historic Preservation Committee. "This measure will help individuals who have actively sought assistance in their recovery from gambling disorder and hold our casinos to a higher ethical standard."

The third bill in the package, S-3064, would increase the Internet casino gaming tax and the Internet sports wagering tax from 15 and 13 percent, respectively, to 30 percent. In 2023, New Jersey casinos generated nearly \$2 billion in online gambling revenue alone, representing a 15 percent increase from the previous year.

"Revenue from online gaming is exploding, and New Jersey is currently taxing this money at a much lower rate than nearby states," said Sen. McKeon. "Raising the tax on online gambling revenue will put us on par with our neighbors. Part of these additional funds will also be dedicated to prevention, education, and treatment programs for compulsive gamblers so that we can help more people in need of these important services."

In neighboring New York and Pennsylvania, online sports betting sites are taxed at 51 percent and 36 percent, respectively. Pennsylvania taxes Internet gaming that simulates electronic gaming devices at 54 percent. New York taxes Internet casino gaming differently based on a casino's location, ranging anywhere from 30 percent to 37 percent.

Since 2018, the year sports betting was legalized in New Jersey, the CCGNJ has seen a 277 percent increase in calls to its 800-GAMBLER Helpline, as well as a growing need for related treatment and public awareness about the state's gambling culture. The

Council, which currently receives no funding from the sports books operating in the state, has requested a change to the tax increase proposal to stipulate that the Council receive a portion of the new revenue.

## Attorney General Launches Year-long Campaign Targeting Problem Gambling, Responsible Play



Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin (*pictured*) recently announced the launch of a nearly year-long public awareness campaign centered on preventing problem gambling and providing resources and support to promote responsible gaming. The announcement came during Problem Gambling Awareness Month (PGAM), an observance that each March raises public awareness about problem gambling and the availability of prevention, treatment, and recovery services.

The campaign will seek to raise messaging about responsible gaming, which refers to a set of policies and practices that aim to minimize the risk of harm to individuals and society as a whole. These resources help individuals identify when gambling activities become compulsory despite an increasing toll on

finances, health, employment, and personal and familial relationships.

“As we learn more and more about the effects of problem gambling, especially following the legalization of sports wagering, we have an obligation to provide resources and support to the public on responsible gaming,” said Attorney General Platkin. “This work starts with ensuring awareness of the many tools available to assist individuals who struggle with gambling, including comprehensive prevention strategies and treatment and recovery services. Our campaign will highlight the responsible gaming measures put in place within our office and available through our partners and stakeholders to assist those in need of help.”

“Legalization has moved gambling out of the shadows, and for most people, legalized gaming does not create a health issue,” said Platkin. “However, it is incumbent upon us to provide stronger solutions for those who do struggle with gambling, whether that means through comprehensive prevention and support strategies, such as our responsible gaming initiatives, or stronger treatment and recovery services for problem gamblers.”

The campaign, most of which will be geared towards online advertisements, arrived during this year’s NCAA Basketball March Madness, and will continue through next year’s Super Bowl LIX. Media placements will be strategically timed around these and other major sporting events, including the NBA Playoffs, Stanley Cup Finals, the Summer Olympics, the MLB postseason, and the Triple Crown races (the Kentucky Derby, Preakness, and Belmont Stakes). The campaign’s messages will offer reminders about betting responsibly, particularly when betting in-game while judgment may be impaired due to alcohol consumption or emotional responses to the ongoing contest.

In addition, the campaign will encourage patrons to utilize some of the responsible gaming limits and controls that all online operators are required to offer to patrons. This contrasts to illegal gambling websites, which by their very nature do not have the same responsible gaming obligations and safeguards as legal websites. The campaign’s messages also will encourage members of the public to “vet before they bet” by checking the list of licensed operators on DGE’s website.

“The Division of Gaming Enforcement enhanced and improved our responsible gaming resources in 2023, and we are excited for the increased awareness that this initiative will bring to the public,” said Mary Jo Flaherty, Interim Director of DGE. “We are eager to

share more information about how individuals can empower themselves with responsible gaming tools, whether that means becoming more self-aware of their behavior, taking more breaks from gaming, or deciding to stay away from a game for a longer period."

The campaign comes approximately six months after a 2023 Rutgers University prevalence report, commissioned by DGE, found that the overall rate of high-risk problem gambling in New Jersey is currently estimated to be almost 6 percent, which is significantly higher than the national average of 1- 2 percent. In addition, the proportion of gamblers who gambled both online and in-person has nearly doubled from 19 percent to 36 percent since 2017, and the proportion of gamblers who are gambling exclusively online has nearly tripled from 5 percent to nearly 15 percent.

Anyone who is struggling with a gambling problem who is looking for confidential support and resources is encouraged to call or text New Jersey's free helpline (1-800-GAMBLER), operated by the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, which since its founding in 1983 has helped countless individuals recover from disordered gambling by facilitating access to various programs, services, and other resources.

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## CCGNJ, NJ Lottery Problem Gambling Campaign Unveils Series of 'Crucial Conversations' Videos

The New Jersey Lottery (NJL) and the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, Inc. (CCGNJ) worked together during Problem Gambling Awareness Month (PGAM) to support efforts to increase awareness of problem gambling throughout. This campaign promotes prevention, treatment and recovery services. This year's theme is



"Betting on Change: Confronting the Surge in Problem Gambling." Problem gambling is behavior that is damaging to a person or their family, often disrupting their daily life and career. The campaign featured a series of videos focusing on crucial conversations addressing different aspects of problem gambling (*to view videos, see links at bottom of story*).

"We are proud to be partners with the CCGNJ in spreading the Responsible Play message and in supporting the Governor's initiative," said NJL Executive Director James A. Carey (*pictured, seated at right, with CCGNJ Executive Director Felicia Grondin and CCGNJ Prevention & Treatment Coordinator Luis Del Orbe*). "The Lottery takes responsible gaming seriously and is always looking for new ways to share information and guide people to resources. This year, with the help of the CCGNJ, we will move from broad awareness to more targeted guidance by providing assistance on how to have a conversation with someone who may be experiencing a problem with gambling."

"We are pleased to be partnering with the Lottery to promote the importance of conversations about problem gambling," said CCGNJ Executive Director Felicia Grondin. "We want the community to understand the broad array of educational and support services available for those affected by disordered and problem gambling and also for the broader community. We encourage individuals and communities to be open to discussing gambling problems and to learn about available resources to get help. The CCGNJ operates a free 24-hour confidential helpline, 1-800-GAMBLER, that can be called before a person starts a conversation with a loved one. For those not ready to speak to anyone, additional resources can be accessed through the CCGNJ website, 800Gambler.org."

The Lottery and the Council developed a series of videos designed to help a person prepare for a conversation about problem gambling and then provide guidance on how the conversation could be handled based on the relationship. Each conversation is

different and illuminates the vital assistance that is available from the CCGNJ. To view the crucial conversation videos, go to the following links:

[Crucial Conversation No. 1 - Preparing to have a crucial conversation about problem gambling](#)

[Crucial Conversation No. 2 - How to talk to my spouse about problem gambling.](#)

[Having a Crucial Conversation Part 3 \(youtube.com\) - How to talk to my teen about problem gambling.](#)

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## CCGNJ Strengthens Staff, Filling Prevention Specialist, Administrative Assistant Positions



The Council of Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey this spring welcomed two new staff members, Felicia Watson and Jake Oleskiewicz (*pictured*). Ms. Watson is the CCGNJ's new Prevention Specialist covering the state's four southern-most counties, Cape May, Salem, Cumberland and Gloucester. Mr. Oleskiewicz fills the new position of Administrative Assistant to Executive Director Felicia Grondin.

Ms. Watson's background includes a 25-year career in the hospitality industry. She was an executive in Casino Marketing for ten years and a Convention, Meetings, and Events Manager for Atlantic City Convention & Visitor Authority (Visit Atlantic City). She returned to school to pursue a degree in Psychology and Drug and Alcohol Addiction and is currently completing her CADC certification. She has been in the counseling field

for over three years.

Mr. Oleskiewicz is a recent graduate from Rutgers University, where he majored in Communications while minoring in Digital Communication, Information, and Media. While in college, he gained experience as a Communication and Customer Experience Intern with NJ TRANSIT.

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### Book a Presentation or Responsible Gambling Training Session

Would you like for the CCGNJ to visit your facility or group to discuss gambling and related disorders? Are you an industry leader who would like your employees to receive Responsible Gambling Training? Presentations and trainings can be provided in person or via Zoom. Please contact Luis Del Orbe, Prevention & Treatment Administrator, at 609-588-5515 (ext 110) or [luis@800gambler.org](mailto:luis@800gambler.org) to schedule a date.



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