

The Council Connection

THE COUNCIL ON COMPULSIVE GAMBLING OF NJ
800-GAMBLER®

November 2024

CCGNJ Undergoes Leadership Change: Luis Del Orbe Named Interim Executive Director

The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, Inc. (CCGNJ) is pleased to announce a transition in its leadership: Effective Friday, November 15, 2024, the Council's Board of Directors appointed Assistant Executive Director Luis Del Orbe as the organization's Interim Executive Director.

Mr. Del Orbe (*pictured*) has been a vital part of CCGNJ since 2018 and has contributed significantly to our mission of supporting individuals and families affected by problem gambling. He brings a wealth of experience and a deep commitment to the organization's goals and values.



The Board of Directors is confident in Mr. Del Orbe's ability to guide CCGNJ through this transitional period while continuing to provide critical services and advocate for responsible gambling practices in New Jersey.

We extend our gratitude to all stakeholders, partners, and community members for their ongoing support as we navigate this change. The Council remains dedicated to improving the lives of those impacted by gambling addiction and fostering public awareness around problem gambling.

For more information, please contact CCGNJ Board of Directors President Fred W. Hogan at fredh@800gambler.org.

Editorial Note: The Message from the Director does not appear in this edition. It will resume in the next issue.

CCGNJ Presents Governor's Gaming Task Force With Input on RG, Problem Gambling Awareness

The Governor's Responsible Gaming Task Force, charged with assessing the impact of gambling's growth in the state, invited The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New

Jersey's (CCGNJ) to contribute its expertise during an Oct. 31 meeting. The Task Force, established earlier this year by Gov. Phil Murphy's executive order, is expected to release a report outlining its findings and recommendations in the spring of 2025. Attorney General Mathew Platkin chairs the body, whose members represent six government agencies that oversee various forms of gambling.

The CCGNJ communicated a number of issues of concern, including how gambling too often comes cloaked as "gaming." Subtracting two letters transforms gambling into gaming, a euphemism that minimizes the risk involved; this mislabeling of gambling softens an activity that has visited hardship on countless individuals. An added dimension of this issue is the abundance of online gaming by adolescents that simulates gambling and often becomes a steppingstone to betting.

A second issue the Council raised also involves wording: the need to distinguish problem gambling from Responsible Gaming (RG), which differ greatly from each other but are often conflated. Problem gambling raises awareness about gambling's addictive nature and responds to individuals whose lives are imperiled by their betting. RG, on the other hand, is a prevention model that encourages bettors to set monetary and time limits on their wagering. The need for much greater awareness between the two is apparent since the Responsible Online Gaming Association reports that only 2-3 percent of gamblers use RG tools, with most believing it is intended strictly for individuals with a betting problem.

The CCGNJ offered the Task Force two recommendations to promote understanding about gambling-related harms. The first is a warning label about gambling's addictive potential, akin to the Surgeon General's notice about tobacco products, which would be posted at brick-and-mortar casinos and online gambling sites. The second recommendation calls for a state-sponsored public service announcement (PSA) conveying the risks of gambling and noting that it can become an addiction.

These two proposals respond to the virtual absence of education about gambling's dark side; it is imperative that we shed light on this issue taking a toll on an increasing number of New Jerseyans, including an alarming number of youth and young adults.



Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey Prevention Specialists Jeanne Swain (left) and Felicia Watson welcome attendees to the Council's Annual Conference on Disordered Gambling.

CCGNJ Conference Examines Betting Enticements, Steps to Financial Restoration, and Recovery



The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey's (CCGNJ) Annual Conference on Disordered Gambling lived up to its billing of taking a stand against the upswell of gambling-related issues arising in New Jersey. The Conference adopted the theme "Betting on Change: Confronting the Surge in Problem Gambling" and featured presentations examining sports gambling and related betting inducements, the financial fallout from problem gambling and steps to restore financial well-being, and recovery from both a clinical and personal perspective.

The Sept. 20 event drew a capacity audience to the New Jersey Hospital Association's Conference Center in Princeton. The day opened with welcoming remarks from Council Board

President Fred W. Hogan and then-Executive Director of the CCGNJ Felicia Grondin. Mr. Hogan identified the twin sources producing the spike in problem gambling: "Online and sports betting are widespread and promoted through excessive gambling ads. The Council has responded to the growing number of challenges by providing help to the ever-increasing number of individuals affected by disordered gambling."

Ms. Grondin lauded the passion and commitment of those present to treat disordered gamblers and raise awareness about problem gambling. She said, "You are all champions, from those who are in recovery to treatment providers and families who help those struggling."

Jody Bechtold and Rob Bumbaco, both of the Pittsburgh-based Better Institute, delivered the Keynote, which outlined sports betting's tremendous growth since a 2018 Supreme Court decision, *Murphy vs. the NCAA*, overturned the ban on legal sports betting (New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy was the plaintiff named in the case). Calls to CCGNJ's 800-GAMBLER Helpline have spiked by 277 percent in the six years since the state legalized sports wagering.

Ms. Bechtold said betting's pervasive presence in sports has entirely remade how people experience sporting events, producing a generation that "is forgetting how to be a fan." Viewers are inundated with ads and subjected to game commentary that discusses the odds, the over/under, as well as the many in-game bets one can make. To drive home how much sports betting content there is, she noted that gambling marketing makes up 20 percent of sports viewing, which encompasses ads as well as sponsorship images. The presentation noted how the smartphone has become the conduit to ever-increasing opportunities to bet. The pairing of gambling with smartphones, Ms. Bechtold said, is creating a nation of 'habitual sports gamblers,' as a video shown during the presentation phrased it. In-game bets mean people can place multiple wagers over the course of a single game, each causing a release of dopamine in the brain and thereby greatly increasing the chance of developing a gambling problem.

Ms. Bechtold cited a recent *Time Magazine* article that said one in ten college students had a gambling disorder and called the rise in problem gambling the next opiate epidemic. Professionals in the mental health field, noting abundant gambling ads and how the industry downplays potential fallout, have increasingly seen a parallel between the opiate crisis and the recent problem gambling surge.

Mr. Bumbaco's portion of the keynote emphasized that athletes are particularly vulnerable to excessive betting. He said these can be athletes at any level, ranging from varsity to club participation. At whatever level, athletes are extremely competitive and are inclined to be risk-takers. He said, "The competitive nature with athletes ... that desire to win obviously triggers that kind of fuel with gambling to want to keep going [and] to want to keep betting until they do have success."

"Perfectionism is another kind of characteristic of athletes that can be a risk factor for gambling because the thought process is, 'The more time I put into something, the more likely I'll have success or develop that specific skill,'" he said. As an athlete, the desire to improve is an asset; as a gambler, it only compounds the problem.

Dr. Jessica Parks-Limbrick, a financial counselor with GamFin, gave an engaging and practical overview of gambling-related financial hardships and guidance on how to restore financial well-being. Dr. Parks was joined by Alex DiMarco, GamFin's founder, who outlined the company's presence in 17 states helping people recover from their gambling debt.

Dr. Parks-Limbrick (*pictured above*) delivered a case study of a family, the Andersons, whose finances were seriously jeopardized by the husband/father, James', gambling disorder. The presentation reviewed options his wife, Linda, could take to protect their finances. One recommendation Dr. Parks-Limbrick made was to avoid filing for bankruptcy except in very extreme cases. For the most part, she said, there are better ways to climb out of gambling-related debt.

She recounted another client's case of a family with traditional gender roles. As the husband's betting imperiled the family's finances, his wife had to get a job to rescue the family, leaving the husband feeling inadequate. This situation led the husband to become more desperate and chase his losses, gambling more and compounding the problem.

The afternoon's first session was given by Seton Hall Professor Dr. Daniel Ladik and Daniel Sartori, a recent master's program graduate of Seton Hall. The two assailed the unseemly practices of sports betting companies to attract more bettors, including those not of legal betting age. Mr. Sartori mentioned ads touting 'no-risk' bets, a term that has been banned but replaced by the similar false promise of 'no-sweat bets." That, he said, is only the beginning of misleading messaging sports betting marketing uses to entice people to open an account and start wagering.

Gambling on games, as noted in the keynote, has changed the way we follow sports. Mr. Sartori said that young children now see their parents watching sports almost entirely through the lens of betting and watching as the fan of a team is fast becoming a relic. While the legal gambling age is 21, many youths are either given access to gambling apps by their parents or older siblings, or are savvy enough to elude the blocks meant to keep them out. In addition, adolescents play online games that serve as gateways to gambling.

The conference's closing presentation was delivered by Dr. Kenneth Martz and Rob Minnick, a recovering problem gambler. The two structured their presentation to alternate between Dr. Martz laying out the clinical progression of disordered gambling, with Mr. Minnick then offering the corresponding first-hand account of his gradual descent into addiction. The last portion of their program featured Dr. Martz detailing the steps essential for recovery from problem gambling, followed by Mr. Minnick recalling his last bet, nearly two years ago, and his embrace of recovery. He has since built a large social media following with messages to raise awareness about gambling issues.

The Conference paused for a remembrance of therapist Patricia Healy, who died just weeks before the mid-September event. CCGNJ Treatment Coordinator Lenny Brazer led a moment of silence and quoted basketball Coach Jim Valvano and Edward Kennedy's eulogy for his brother Robert Kennedy in capturing Ms. Healy's many admirable qualities. Mr. Brazer said of Ms. Healy, "Patty was the pinnacle of compassion, empathy and hope." Fifteen minutes in her company, he said, would supply Coach Valvano's daily recommended allotment of thought, laughter and feeling one's emotions sufficiently to be brought to tears." Many in attendance share Ms. Healy's passion for

Joint Committee Hearing Reveals Sports Betting As Economic Boon and Problem Gambling Catalyst



The New Jersey Legislature convened a joint committee session on Oct.24 at which a handful of experts outlined the impact of online sports betting since its legalization six years ago. What emerged from the two hours of testimony was sports gambling being a double-edged sword in the state: an economic engine for employment and revenue as well as the driver of a serious spike in problem gambling.

Among the invited witnesses was then-Executive Director of the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey Felicia Grondin (*pictured above at witness table, facing committee members*). She and a number of other expert witnesses testified before members of the Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism and Historic Preservation Committee and the Assembly Tourism, Gaming and the Arts Committee, the panels in each legislative house responsible for oversight of gambling.

Representatives from academia, the NCAA, the gambling industry preceded Ms. Grondin in offering testimony that ranged from sharing her concern about worsening problem gambling to online gambling's impact the on overall economy and on Atlantic City casinos to illegal offshore sports betting sites that are neither regulated nor taxed. The one point of agreement was the extraordinary growth of sports betting that has occurred in the state since 2018.

The first witness the committee heard from was Dr. Jane Bokunewicz, director of the Lloyd D. Levenson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality & Tourism at Stockton University. Her presentation outlined the tremendous expansion of gambling, touching on both the economic benefits while also acknowledging the accompanying uptick in problem gambling.

Following Dr. Bokunewicz was a fellow academic, Rutgers University's gambling researcher Dr. Lia Nower. She noted the role of online games in paving the way for youth to gamble. She said children as young as 10 play games that simulate gambling and serve to "prime" them for betting.

The stigma facing disordered gambling was also addressed by Dr. Nower. She noted that the stigma towards problem gambling is still in the dark ages compared to changed public attitudes about smoking and drinking. The persistent negative views about disordered gambling prevent problem bettors from seeking help.

Speaking on the economic benefits of sport betting was Jeremy Kudon, president of the Sports Betting Alliance, which comprises 89 percent of the sports betting market share. Mr. Kudon urged lawmakers to hold the line on the tax rate on sports books. He called North Jersey "the Silicon Valley" of sports betting, touting the 4,000 jobs the industry has brought to the state. He disputed claims that online betting has cannibalized brick and mortar casinos, despite statistics illustrating Atlantic City betting revenue has plateaued since before the pandemic.

Joining Mr. Kudon at the witness table was Lori Kalani, chief Responsible Gaming Officer for DraftKings. She opened her remarks by recalling an upbringing in Las Vegas that was marred by her parents' problem gambling. DraftKings, she said, takes RG very seriously, with 60 staff dedicated to identifying and responding to instances of customers who show signs of betting to excess. She said the app will message bettors who may be gambling too much.

Tim Buckley, senior vice president of External Affairs, National College Athletic Association (NCAA), described a disturbing trend facing college athletes since sports betting's legalization. Gamblers are now making unfounded accusations on social media alleging that athletes are taking bribes to throw a game or otherwise underperform. Mr. Buckley reported that gamblers post violence threats against the college athletes they blame for their betting losses. The NCAA opposed sports betting's legalization in *Murphy vs the NCAA*, the 2018 Supreme Court decision that overturned the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act.

Tourism, Gaming and the Arts Committee

A bill before the New Jersey Legislature, A4905, targets bettor harassment of student athletes with a proposed ban of player-specific bets in college sports. The measure advanced with a vote on Nov. 14 releasing it from the Assembly Tourism, Gaming and the Arts Committee.

The committee members, recognizing the CCGNJ's long standing as an authority on problem gambling, scheduled Ms. Grondin as the closing witness. Ms. Grondin began by stating the Council's long-held position of not being for or against gambling, but she voiced a growing concern about online and sports betting giving rise to a gambling culture in the state and worsening problem gambling.

She summarized the Council's two-pronged mission: helping the problem gambler via the 800-GAMBLER Helpline and raising awareness about gambling's potential to devastate the bettor and his/her family. Helpline calls, she said, have spiked by 277 percent since the 2018 legalization of sports gambling. New Jersey's rate of problem gambling is three times the national average, a gap attributed to the state's deep-seated ties to gambling, the abundant opportunities to wager and the barrage of gambling ads.

Ms. Grondin cited a Helpline statistic revealing the recent demographic shift to more younger bettors developing a problem: a majority of calls (54 percent) now come from those 34 years old or younger, a first. Furthermore, 100 percent of calls from people under the age of 25 come from young men, who do the lion's share of sports betting.

Sen. John McKeon, sponsor of a package of bills focused on the problems arising from online gambling, issued a press release after the hearing. The Senator said, "While sports betting has clearly been an economic windfall, the testimony we heard on the human cost is staggering. An estimated 200,000 New Jerseyans are grappling with gambling addiction, some starting as young as seven years old, and the problem only seems to be intensifying."



At a press conference announcing the SAFE Bet Act are (from left) U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-Ct); U.S. Congressman Paul D. Tonko (D-NY); Gordon Douglas (father of individual in recovery for gambling disorder); Harry Levant, Gambling Policy Adviser, Public Health Advocacy Institute and gambling therapist, Ethos Treatment Center; and Mark Gottlieb, Executive Director, Public Health Advocacy Institute.

SAFE Bet Act Puts Forward Standards To Curtail Betting Ads, Youth Access

Just as the NFL football season got underway, two members of Congress from neighboring states, Rep. Paul D. Tonko (NY-20) and U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-Ct.), held a press conference outside the U.S. Capitol to outline the Supporting Affordability and Fairness with Every Bet (SAFE Bet) Act, landmark legislation that would create nationwide consumer protections and standards for the mobile sports gambling industry. The two lawmakers were joined by representatives of the Public Health Advocacy Institute (PHAI) and a father whose son developed a serious sports gambling disorder.

The SAFE Bet Act would address the public health implications resulting from the widespread legalization of sports betting in the United States, which occurred in the wake of the 2018 Supreme Court *Murphy vs the NCAA* decision. The legislation would require states offering sports betting to meet minimum federal standards in the categories of advertising, affordability and Artificial Intelligence to create a safer, less addictive product.

“Until recently, sports and sporting events had long been a chance for family, friends, and strangers to gather together in celebration of beloved teams and athletes in a great American pastime,” Rep. Tonko said. “But now, every single moment of every sporting event across the globe has become a betting opportunity. That’s resulted in a frightening rise in gambling disorder, which has in turn enacted a horrific toll on individuals, many of whom have lost their home, job, marriage, and their lives. We have a duty to protect people and their families from suffering the tremendous harm related to gambling addiction.”

The measure’s Senate sponsor, Sen. Blumenthal, described the legislation as “a matter

of public health. It is a matter of stopping addiction, saving lives, and making sure that young people particularly are protected against exploitation.”

Dr. Harry Levant, director of Gambling Policy, PHAI said , “We have known for more than 10 years that gambling is an addictive product and gambling disorder is an addiction similar to heroin, opioids, tobacco, alcohol, and cocaine. With every other addictive product or substance, the government regulates the advertising, promotion, distribution, and consumption of the product. This is to prevent harm and protect public health. With gambling, sadly, the exact opposite is occurring. The gambling industry business model is designed to deliver constant and non-stop gambling action on every phone, tablet, and computer.

Dr. Levant decried the advent of micro-bets, also known as in-game bets, which allow multiple bets to be placed during one sporting event. “With the use of cutting-edge technology and artificial intelligence, the gambling industry has turned every micro moment in each game or sporting event into constant gambling action. The gambling industry and its sports partners have taken sports away from children, families, and the American public. Every pitch, shot, snap, serve, swing, and more are now used for gambling. Sports have become the equivalent of a non-stop slot machine.”

Mark Gottlieb, executive director of PHAI said , “The predatory practices of the gambling industry have resulted in a looming public health crisis and at the Public Health Advocacy Institute we are duty bound to act ... With gambling, this means replacing the failed “responsible gaming” model with a comprehensive public health response. This includes the SAFE Bet Act, and the Public Health Advocacy Institute is pleased to support Congressman Tonko and Senator Blumenthal as we work for passage of the SAFE Bet Act.” The Council on Compulsive Gambling has criticized the gambling industry’s strict focus on responsible gambling, which places the onus entirely on the betting customer and omits any messaging about the fallout from problem gambling.

Gordon Douglas, whose son Andrew is in recovery for gambling disorder, said: "Andrew started online betting by signing up with one gambling company. He soon received promotions and offers from at least six more gambling companies. Gambling promotions and advertising were all over his phone, computer and television. With virtually no limits on his betting opportunities at all hours of the day, every day of the week, he couldn't find relief. He became a different person that would say anything to get money to gamble. He reached a point of wanting to end his life because he saw no way out. Thankfully, our story did not end in tragedy. Unlike many people, we had the means to help him get on a path to recovery. We as a country should not allow him and others like him to be exploited. We should do what is right to limit access to this type of gambling.”

Assembly Proposal Would Bar NJ Public Colleges From Partnering with Sport Betting Companies

The New Jersey Assembly Higher Education Committee recently gave its unanimous support to A-4113, a measure that would prohibit public institutions of higher education from entering into partnerships with sports wagering companies. Amendments to the bill weakened it to some degree, in particular a change to allow public college-affiliated foundations to partner with sports gambling entities.

The bill responds to a trend that witnessed several major universities across the country from partnerships with sports betting companies, resulting in the companies’ names being emblazoned on stadiums and students receiving betting inducements via email and social media. Schools that entered such contracts include Michigan State University, the University of Colorado and Louisiana State University; most of the colleges have withdrawn from the contracts after a public backlash against the deals. To date, no New Jersey colleges, public or private, have formed a sports betting partnership.

The legislation, which is sponsored by Assemblywoman Linda Carter, Assemblyman Benjie E. Wimberly, and Assemblyman Reginald W. Atkins, defines a sports wagering

partnership as a partnership or a contractual agreement between a sports wagering operator or intermediary and a public institution of higher education, including an athletic department or booster club of the institution, for access to advertise in the institution's stadiums and other facilities, in digital and broadcast sports content, and through other means.

The amended bill specifies that a foundation institutionally related to a public institution of higher education is not prohibited from forming a sports wagering partnership, provided that the partnership does not include direct advertising or marketing to students enrolled in the institution. Under the amended bill, direct advertising or marketing includes advertising or marketing at on-campus locations and off-campus locations associated with the institution, and any electronic advertising or marketing explicitly directed to students enrolled in the institution.

Additionally, the amended bill provides that the ban on these partnerships would not apply in cases where the partnership between a public college and betting entity is established for academic purposes or provides experiential learning opportunities to students enrolled in the institution. Stockton University's Lloyd D. Levenson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality, and Tourism, for instance, offers courses to students pursuing a gambling-related degree and has a consulting relationship with nine casinos.

FDU Poll: One in Ten Young Men Have a Gambling Problem

The legalization of online gambling and sports betting in much of the United States over the past few years has led to troubling signs of gambling problems among certain groups, especially young men. According to the results from a recent Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of registered voters, ten percent of men 18-30 years old have responses that indicate a problem gambling, compared to 3 percent of the overall population. The survey, which was released on Sept. 19, shows that such problems are closely related to online betting on sports and online slot machines.



Fifty-seven percent of American voters say that they participate in some kind of gambling or betting behavior in the past year. Seventeen percent took part in just one form, with lottery tickets (43 percent) edging out scratch-off tickets (36 percent) as the most common forms of gambling in the country. About 18 percent say that they've played casino games or slot machines in person, and ten percent say that they've bet on sports or races online in the past year.

Among both men and women, lottery tickets and scratch-offs are the most common form of betting, but online sports betting is much more popular among men (15 percent) than women (6 percent). Online betting on sports is concentrated among young men: only 10 percent of voters say that they've bet on sports or racing online in the last year, but that figure is 26 percent for men under the age of 45. Online sports betting is also relatively popular among young women, with 19 percent of women 30 and under saying that they've bet on a game or a race in the past year.

In addition to polling questions, the survey asked respondents also to complete the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), a nine-question battery that asks about a number of indications of problem gambling behaviors (now often referred to as "gambling harm"), like borrowing money to gamble, or saying that their gambling has caused financial or emotional problems. Individuals are generally considered to have a gambling disorder and possible loss of control if they have a score of 8 or 9 on the PGSI.

Most voters who say that they gamble don't report any behaviors that are signs of a gambling problem. However, 21 percent of all voters report at least one problem behavior (35 percent of those who report gambling in some form), with 15 percent of those who report gambling saying that they have one problem behavior, and 20 percent of gamblers reporting two or more.

Twenty-four percent of men report at least one problem behavior on the PGSI, but that figure is 45 percent for men 30 and under, and 38 percent of men 31 to 44 years old. Only about 5 percent of men 45 and above report any such behaviors. Women are less likely to report problem behaviors – just 18 percent do – but one-third of women 30 years old and under (33 percent) have at least one problem behavior. As with gambling behavior generally, problem behaviors are also concentrated among Americans without a college degree (25 percent with one or more).

Online gambling is more related to problem behaviors: 68 percent of respondents who indicate they bet on sports online report at least one problem gambling behavior, and a majority (53 percent) have two or more. Eighty-one percent of voters who play online slots have at least one problem behavior, with two-thirds having two or more; these figures are much higher than for similar games played in person.

Overall, about 3 percent of US voters had scores high enough to indicate a problem, but that figure varies widely by demographics, and the types of bets being made. For instance, only about 3 percent of men have PGSI scores that indicate a gambling problem, but that figure is 10 percent among men ages 18 to 30, and seven percent among women in the same age group. Older respondents in the sample were much less likely to have PGSI scores high enough to be concerning.

Online gambling is also much more closely related to high scores on the PGSI than in-person gambling. Just six percent of voters who say that they play casino games in person have scores of 8 or above on the PGSI, but that figure is 17 percent for those who bet on sports and for those who play slot machines online.

To read the full FDU Poll press release and view the survey, please go to: [FDU Poll](#)

Book a Presentation or Training Session

Would you like for the CCGNJ to visit your 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, Interim Executive Director, at 609-588-5515 (ext. 110) or luis@800gambler.org to schedule a date.

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