

## **House Finance and Taxation Committee**

### **HB 1212**

**Tuesday, January 26, 2021**

**Good morning Chairman Headland and members of the Finance and Taxation Committee. My name is Lisa Vig. I stand before you today, likely for the last time, as an employee of Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota. My last day of employment with LSS will be on Friday, January 29, the day the doors to an amazing agency are closed.**

**My entire professional career, 31 years, has been with LSSND and has been devoted to providing gambling addiction treatment, prevention and public awareness to the citizens of ND and beyond. Collectively, the 3 clinicians of the Gamblers Choice program have over 100 years of experience and expertise with this population and come with the highest level of credentialing of anyone in the State of ND. With gratitude, on Monday, February 1, the staff of Gamblers Choice will become temporary employees of the state of ND until a permanent home can be found for the program.**

**The Behavioral Health Division under the direction of Pam Sagness immediately began working with our gambling contract manager, James Knopik, to find a way to keep these critical services going in North Dakota.**

**The local news over the weekend in Fargo featured several high profile stories about the increase in drug overdoses, rising meth addiction, sting operations, prosecution of drug dealers and the devastating effects on family members. Of course, these stories create a heightened awareness and education about the tragedy of drug addiction.**

So what about the stories and faces of gambling addiction? These stories rarely make the news or the headlines. You haven't heard the stories and confessions of embezzlement from beloved employers and organizations, theft from the petty cash drawers at work or their children's piggy banks late at night. I have. You haven't heard about the lingering trauma resulting from the death of 2 innocent people on a highway after 72 hours of non-stop gambling. I have. You haven't heard the desperate stories of scrounging under car seats or sofa cushions, looking for spare change to buy 1 or 2 gallons of gas, hoping to make it to work tomorrow. You haven't heard stories of prostitution, for one more \$50 bill, that have resulted in a life altering diagnosis of HIV. You haven't met the people who now agonize over the fact that they have no relationship with their adult sons and daughters, because gambling was more important. You have no idea what it's like to hear someone describe the regret they have for not having the "guts" to drive their vehicle into an oncoming semi-truck on the highway after losing yet another paycheck. And then there's our 63 year old grandmother who spent an entire day taking every article of her clothing to local thrift stores before researching on Youtube how to load and shoot her husband's pistol. Thank God the gun jammed. And then there's the young gentleman who flipped his vehicle on an icy highway, waiting hours in freezing temps for the wrecker to arrive to turn it upright, only to proceed on his way to Mystic Lake Casino at 4 AM. I have heard these stories and I know these people... and you know what, these people are the lucky ones, because they found someone to tell their stories to.

When the lottery was legalized in 2004, I testified a number of times regarding the need to set aside funds for treatment and prevention efforts. Many legislators questioned if it was very fair, since typically, traditional lottery play does not usually result in addictive play. All

forms of gambling, especially if sponsored by the State and benefitting the State's general fund, should be making contributions to help those who are negatively impacted. Current contributors are the lottery, ND tribal casinos, and The Racing Commission. Contributions from charitable gambling, which has been legal in ND since 1977 are long overdue.

In just over 2 years, Gross Proceeds from charitable e-tab activity alone is well over \$1 billion dollars and Adjusted Gross proceeds over \$169 million.

I applaud the sponsors of HB 1212 and the intention to set aside \$10,000 per quarter for the gambling disorder prevention and treatment fund, but with all due respect, to those who are still suffering from this hidden illness and their families who are innocent bystanders, this is just not acceptable.

On behalf of those who have found help and for those who are still out there suffering, I respectfully request that the set aside in HB 1212 for the gambling disorder prevention and treatment fund, at the very least, match the current lottery contribution, \$80,000 per quarter.

Thank you for time today.

Lisa Vig, LAC, ICGC

Program Director

Gamblers Choice Lutheran Social Services of ND