

**Testimony**  
**Senate Bill No. 2205**  
**Senate Judiciary Committee**  
**Senator Diane Larson, Chairman**  
January 22, 2025

Chairman Larson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I am Lisa Vig, Gambling Disorder Counselor- Clinical Lead with the Department of Health and Human Services (Department). I appear before you in support of Senate Bill No. 2205.

During the 68<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly an appropriation of \$500,000 was allocated to the Problem Gambling Treatment and Prevention fund from charitable gaming. This created a total biennium budget of \$1,212,800. Senate Bill No. 2205 would ensure ongoing support for this fund at the same level of funding to address growing gambling disorder concerns for individuals in the state.

The Problem Gambling Team has kept extensive data on those who have sought services for the past 20+ years. Recently, the following trends have been noted:

- Electronic pull tab machines have been identified by clients as the most problematic form of gambling since 2019.
- In the most recent 6 months, online gambling activity has tied with casino gambling for the second most problematic form of gambling identified by clients.
- The gender of individual's served is 50% male and 50% female. The prior 6 months had been primarily male.

- The primary age group seeking help has consistently been 31-40. In the past 6 months, there has been a noticeable increase in the 18-30 age group.
- Since FY 2022, **570** North Dakotans have received treatment/counseling services. **3,449** hours of in person and telehealth counseling hours have been provided by the 3 clinicians delivering services.

Currently, there is an Administrative Assistant dedicated for problem gambling services and 3 certified clinicians treating Disordered Gambling across North Dakota. Two clinicians serve the eastern side of North Dakota and 1 clinician serves western North Dakota.

In the 2023-2025 legislative session the question of how many problem gamblers are in ND was repeatedly asked. An incidence and prevalence study is currently underway with designated funding from the last session. Principal researcher Rachel Volberg of Gemini Research is conducting the study. The findings of this research study are forthcoming. Incidentally, she conducted the very first incidence and prevalence study in 2000, in partnership with the ND Indian Gaming Association.

Gaps remain in the continuum of care around problem gambling:

- Representative Payee services/trusted debt consolidation and debt restructuring programs are lacking.
- Arrangements among gambling entities to create a system where 'self banning' from establishments is available.
- Funding to offer financial support to ND residents who are needing inpatient placement. Approximately 4 designated inpatient programs are available in the US for problem gambling.

- Residential housing for those needing additional accountability, structure, and support as they pursue recovery.
- Designated prevention and educational programs for middle and high school.
- Designated prevention and educational programs for our State universities and colleges.

If funding outlined in Senate Bill No. 2205 continues, the Department would:

- Continue to fund the current problem gambling team of 4 to provide and support gambling disorder treatment services.
- Train behavioral health and addiction counselors on screening for gambling disorder.
- Continue of contracts to promote awareness of services and promotion of problem gambling prevention.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to try to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you.