



**Senate of Pennsylvania  
Community, Economic and Recreational Development Committee  
Informational Hearing on Compulsive and Problem  
Gambling Programs in the Commonwealth  
March 1, 2011**

Good morning Chairwoman Earll, Chairman Piccola, Chairman Fontana, Members of the Committee, and staff. My name is Robin Rothermel, and I am the Director for the Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Programs (Bureau) for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update as well as answer any specific questions on the status of the Pennsylvania Department of Health's (Department) efforts to maintain a comprehensive and effective problem gambling program for the citizens of this Commonwealth. The Department recognizes problem and compulsive gambling poses a significant, public health risk which can be mitigated with the implementation of an effective prevention, public awareness and treatment campaign. This is echoed in Senate Resolution 25, which observes the week of March 6 through 12, 2011 as "National Problem Gambling Awareness Week" and March 2011 as "Problem Gambling Awareness Month". As the public health entity, you have the Department's commitment to continue to carry out these programs in an effective manner to confront the public health issues that arise from problem gambling.

The Department of Health (Department) is designated as the lead agency under Act 1 of 2010 for the management of the Compulsive and Problem Gambling Program. The Department is tasked with providing programs for public education, awareness and training regarding compulsive and problem gambling; as well as the treatment and prevention of compulsive and problem gambling.

According to the 2009 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), which is an annual survey of Pennsylvania residents aged 18 and older, approximately 27% of Pennsylvania adults gambled in the past 12 months. Of those who gambled, approximately 62% played slot machines. Additionally, current smokers gambled at a significantly higher rate than those who have never smoked and chronic users of alcohol gambled at a significantly higher rate than non-chronic alcohol users.

To support interagency cooperation, in November 2006 the Department convened the Compulsive Gambling Consortium, which was comprised of members from the Department of Revenue– Lottery Commission, Department of Agriculture - Horse Racing Commission and Harness Racing Commission, and the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board. Since then, the Council on Compulsive Gambling of Pennsylvania, the Governor’s Advisory Commission on Asian American Affairs, and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency have joined the

Consortium. Regular meetings are held to discuss problem and compulsive gambling and to strategize on ways Commonwealth agencies can best work together.

The increased availability of legalized gambling in Pennsylvania can lead to heightened concern about individual and social costs of problem gambling. The Department is continuing to address this concern by providing problem gambling prevention programs. In November 2009, the Council on Compulsive Gambling of Pennsylvania (CCGP) received a three-year pilot program grant from the Bureau for the “Smart Choices” Program. The “Smart Choices” Program addresses the potential for problem gambling in elementary school age children through college age students. Research indicates that 80 percent of students between the ages of 12 to 17 have gambled for money in the past year. The intention behind the program is to focus on the inherent risks of gambling and emphasize positive decision-making skills. Evidence suggests that improved understanding of risk-taking, improved decision-making and support from the environment all enable young people to better use their refusal skills and make much smarter choices with the use of their time, money and relationships with family and friends.

In December 2006, the Department established a Gambling Addiction Information and Referral Helpline: 1-877-565-2112. This Helpline number is solely owned by

the Commonwealth and, will therefore remain constant, even as contractors, providers and assistance organizations may change. The Department also made a strategic decision to expand the scope of the Helpline to include not only family members, as stated in the legislation, but also individuals who may be in crisis situations or experiencing difficulties as a result of compulsive and problem gambling. By offering an expanded scope of referral, we are able to best serve those experiencing multiple issues, such as an individual with a gambling addiction who is also battling substance or alcohol abuse. Trained operators take Helpline calls 24-hours a day, seven days a week, in a free and confidential manner. In 2010 the Department entered into an agreement with the Council on Compulsive Gambling of Pennsylvania to operate the gambling Helpline. This resulted in all gambling hotline numbers in Pennsylvania being answered by the same vendor. By doing this, we can ensure that all callers are being offered the same menu of services. The total number of intake calls into the Helpline during calendar year 2010 was 2444. Of those total calls, 1256 were given referrals to treatment providers.

As stated in Senate Resolution 25, problem gambling is treatable, and treatment is effective in minimizing the harm to both individuals and society as a whole. The Department helps to ensure the availability of treatment providers by reimbursing *approved* providers for Outpatient individual and group Gambling Counseling

Services through Participating Provider Agreements (PPAs). All approved providers must submit admission and discharge data to the Bureau. Currently, the Bureau has 98 certified clinicians available to offer problem gambling treatment services. The Bureau has also recently reached out to over 500 clinicians throughout the Commonwealth in an attempt to recruit additional clinicians who can further enhance our network of providers. Moreover, in 2009, the Bureau subcontracted with the Institute for Research, Education and Training in Addictions (IRETA) to provide ongoing clinical supervision to problem gambling counselors who are seeking certification as a Nationally Certified Gambling Counselor. As of February 11, 2011, 237 individuals have been authorized for problem gambling treatment.

Senate Resolution 25 urges the Department is urged to promote public awareness campaigns regarding the recognition and prevention of problem gambling. The Department concurs with this charge and have launched a statewide radio and TV Public Service Announcement (PSA) campaign that coincided with the introduction of table games. Other highlights of the campaign include billboards, web banners, gas pump toppers, print advertisements, ATM receipts and poster panels. The goal of this effort is to increase public awareness of compulsive and problem gambling services that are available throughout the Commonwealth to assist those having problems associated with gambling addiction. Persons

interested in obtaining more information are directed to the toll free Problem Gambling Helpline (1-877-565-2112) and the website, [www.paproblemgambling.com](http://www.paproblemgambling.com). Also, the Department continues to provide mini-grants to approved individuals and organizations for the purpose of increasing public awareness about problem and compulsive gambling. The mini-grants are intended to facilitate a means by which individuals and agencies can educate their local community on issues related to problem and compulsive gambling.

Additionally, the Department has provided funding to the Single County Authorities (SCAs) to collect data in their local service areas and complete Problem Gambling Needs Assessments. These assessments will assist in identifying specific communities with high need as well as identifying existing resources. The Department also released a Funding Initiative to the Single County Authorities to assist in implementing problem gambling prevention-related programming efforts.

Additionally, Act 1 of 2010 created a new requirement that transferred \$3,000,000 annually from the State Gaming Fund to the Department. The full amount of these funds are then allocated to the SCAs solely for financing drug and alcohol addiction assessments, including drug and alcohol addiction assessments including assessments related to compulsive and problem gambling, and for the related

addiction treatment in non-hospital residential detoxification facilities, non-hospital residential rehabilitation facilities and halfway houses licensed by the Department to provide addiction treatment services. From January 1, 2010 to June 30, 2010, 4830 individuals received the aforementioned services (assessment, detox, rehab, and halfway house). Additional details regarding the expenditure of the \$3,000,000 is reflected in the *2010 Compulsive and Problem Gambling Annual Report*. In addition, this Annual Report contains a detailed summary of all activities conducted through the Compulsive and Problem Gambling Program. both substance abuse services as well as problem gambling services.

### Conclusion

Problem gambling is, and will continue to be, a compelling public health concern affecting Pennsylvanians of all ages, races, and ethnic backgrounds in communities across the Commonwealth. The societal and economic cost can be significant, but can be countered by targeted treatment aimed at minimizing harm to both the individual and society as a whole. The Department has worked to develop and implement a comprehensive, coordinated and effective compulsive and problem gambling prevention, awareness, and treatment program for the Commonwealth since the passage of Act 71 in 2004. In continuing to serve the Commonwealth, the Department will continue to work with the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board, the Council on Compulsive Gambling of Pennsylvania, relevant

stakeholders and others who are committed to helping those with a gambling problem.

Again, I thank the Members of this committee for holding a hearing to discuss this important public health issue. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have at this time.





## **Robin Rothermel, Director, Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Programs**

Robin L. Rothermel serves as the Director for the Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Programs, Pennsylvania Department of Health. In this position, Ms. Rothermel is responsible for the management of the Bureau, and develops, directs and coordinates all activities of the bureau, through subordinate division directors and managers in the Divisions of Prevention, Treatment and Program Monitoring. In addition, she develops, directs and coordinates a program to provide public education and awareness on problem gambling; training for clinical staff about compulsive and problem gambling, treatment options, prevention programs and a hotline for public information, referral services and crisis services. She is responsible for program planning and development of standards, guidelines, service descriptions, and outcome data for all functions of the substance abuse and compulsive and problem gambling service delivery systems, and for providing training resources to substance abuse and gambling professionals in Pennsylvania.

Ms. Rothermel is a graduate of Shippensburg University and has worked in the substance abuse field for over 20 years. She has worked at the substance abuse treatment provider level as well as the state and local level. She has held direct service, case management, supervision, and management positions. Prior to her current position, Ms. Rothermel served as the Director for the Division of Treatment within the Bureau.