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**Testimony  
by  
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission,

First, I want to thank you inviting me to testify in front of this panel. I also want to thank Acting Executive Director Williams and OASAS Commissioner González-Sánchez for their leadership in addressing problem gambling in New York State.

I am a Professor of Psychiatry at Columbia University and the Director of its Gambling Disorders Clinic. I have spent the last 25 years of my life treating problem gamblers and doing research on how to improve their treatment.

I would like to make three simple points today and offer three recommendations:

The first point is that, as it happens with alcohol consumption, most individuals who gamble do not develop gambling problems. Although estimates vary across studies, there is broad consensus that only about 3-5% individuals in the general population go on to develop gambling problems. That still represents several hundred thousand New Yorkers. Younger individuals, those with substance abuse or with other psychiatric disorders and those living closer to a casino appear to be at higher risk for gambling problems.

The second point is that, as other addictions, problem gambling is associated with a host of negative consequences. These are not only financial, but include also lost jobs and wages, increased criminality, greater rates of divorce, spousal abuse, child neglect and elevated rates of suicide attempts, among others.

The third point, which follows from the second, is that I believe we have an obligation to help those with gambling problems and to develop policies that encourage responsible gaming and protect those at increased risk, such as minors and individuals with a history of gambling problems. Our obligation to help may be even greater because as a State, we collect taxes from gambling and even through some venues, such as the lottery, sponsor gambling.

How can we help? Based on these facts, I would like to offer three recommendations:

First, we should increase awareness of problem gambling. Most people do know that problem gambling is a psychiatric disorder and even fewer people know that problem gambling can be effectively treated. One way to increase awareness would be to mention in every advertisement about gambling that problem gambling as a possible side effect of gambling, the same way we inform about potential adverse effects of alcohol or even medications. There may be other ways to increase awareness about gambling.

Second, we should fund the provision of evidence-based treatments for problem gambling. My colleague Professor and Dean Edelgard (“Elga” Wulfert will testify more extensively on this point.

Third, we need to conduct research to improve existing treatments for problem gambling, to understand the biological and psychological determinants that increase the risk to develop problem gambling, and to obtain the scientific knowledge to develop rational policies for responsible gambling and effective prevention strategies.

We have now a truly unique opportunity to build partnerships to address problem gambling in New York State and I look forward to working together on these issues.

I hope my testimony will be of use to the Commission. I will be happy to answer any questions.

Thank you.