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THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
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Alcoholism and Drug Abuse
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New York State Gaming Commission

Public Forum

Problem Gambling and Commercial Casino Development

Meeting Room 7, Empire State Plaza, Albany, New York

Wednesday, April 9TH - 10am

TESTIMONY OF ASSEMBLYMEMBER STEVEN CYMBROWITZ

Hello. As Chairman of the Assembly Committee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, I would like to thank Chair Mark D. Gearan and all the members of the New York State Gaming Commission for inviting me to speak this morning. I would also like to recognize the Commissioner of OASAS, Arlene Gonzalez-Sanchez; during my tenure as Chairman, she has been a tremendous partner in supporting and developing policies which aim to help those who are suffering from addiction.

I applaud the Commission for its insight by convening this public forum on problem gambling and commercial casino development. By facilitating a public discussion and highlighting the importance of the problem gambling provisions set forth in the Upstate New York Economic Development Act, New York can send a strong and important message that we are committed

to not only helping with the economic revival of upstate communities; but we are equally concerned with helping those who are at risk or are suffering from a gambling addiction.

In my comments today I would like to focus on what I believe each applicant should consider when developing their problem gambling plans as well as how to ensure we can most effectively meet the needs of those who are dealing with a gambling addiction. The first topic I would like to discuss is New York State's self-exclusion program.

Self-Exclusion Program

Currently in New York, as with most states that permit gambling, a self-exclusion program requires that a gaming facility offer an individual the ability to voluntarily place themselves on a self-exclusion list; in theory, this will prevent them from entering, placing a wager, or collecting winnings from a gambling facility. In addition, if an individual is seen on the premises of a facility, they may be escorted off the casino's property, and if necessary in some instances, with the use of local law enforcement.

It is my recommendation that any self-exclusion program must emphasize educating casino patrons about what compulsive gambling is; how to recognize the symptoms of compulsive gambling; and what resources are available for the treatment of compulsive gambling. It seems to me that a person who voluntarily excludes themselves from gaming activities is concerned to some degree that gambling is negatively impacting their life.

Just as we talk about early detection of alcohol and drug use, there is a better chance of preventing a compulsive gambling disorder and avoiding the social and public health consequences if the addiction can be caught early.

Developing self-exclusion programs which emphasize education and treatment for compulsive gambling is not unprecedented. The State of Maryland requires that an individual who is requesting removal from a self-exclusion list undergo a problem gambling assessment by a professional who is licensed by the state; complete any recommended treatment; and complete a problem gambling treatment and prevention program. In Kansas, prior to being considered for removal from a self-exclusion list, an individual must complete a problem gambling assessment with a certified counselor and complete a series of courses about healthy lifestyle choices.

By creating a self-exclusion program that underlines education, as well as supports and services for compulsive gamblers, casinos would be in a better position to help mitigate the consequences associated with compulsive gambling. I would also urge the Commission to require the racinos currently operating in New York State to adopt and implement the same policies and procedures related to a commercial gaming casino's self-exclusion program. This will ensure a cohesive statewide program that hopefully will result in identifying more individuals across the state that are at risk, or are in need of supports and services for compulsive gambling.

Another important component to consider when developing a problem gambling plan is on-site compulsive gambling supports and services.