

Vermont Association for Mental Health and Addiction Recovery

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Re: S. 252 and the expansion of gambling, testimony of 4/6/16

Thanks for inviting me here today. I am Peter Espenshade the President of the Vermont Association for Mental Health and Addiction Recovery. We study gambling addiction in Vermont and we work to prevent predatory gaming.

I have three brief, but important, things to share about S. 252: relating to the sale of Lottery Products.

1. The first is that very word: products. This bill — and other recent bills — replaces the term lottery “ticket sales” with the term lottery “products.” This is potentially a huge change in Vermont and one that should not be hidden under the generic term products. Products can mean anything. We need to know what products we are talking about. I believe that any bill related to the lottery must define what these products are. What it appears to mean in this case is the expansion of gambling from classic lottery tickets to video gambling machines. The lottery is currently piloting 20+ video gambling machines in twenty bars statewide. Most of these bars are in low-income neighborhoods. This means that impaired, low-income Vermonters, are playing video gambling machines. Our research and the findings of an independent investigative journalist¹ show that lottery players are disproportionately low-income Vermonters.

¹ *Times Argus*, Data Suggest More Lottery Buyers are Low Income, 1/7/16

2. S. 252 repeals limits on where these products, which may mean video gambling machines can be placed. The video gambling machines are designed to give a predetermined outcome, the moment play begins. The player is then put through a charade of pushing buttons before the results are announced. The pushing of these buttons has zero outcome on the predetermined results.

3. We need to know in writing what this bill is really about and what its impact might be. It is our concern that this bill as written appears will allow the placement of video gambling machines everywhere from bars, to town clerks' offices, to state fairs. If so, these are machines and locations that tend to target lower-income and other vulnerable Vermonters. This change may represent a dramatic expansion of gambling in Vermont. It appears to be a major shift in public policy. Without any public discussion.

We believe that S.252 should not be passed. Thank you.