

Testimony for
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Madame Chairperson, members of the Commission, I appreciate having this opportunity to appear before you today. Given the scope of the study assigned this body, I believe it would be helpful for you to know what the National Center for Responsible Gaming (NCRG) is about and how our work might be of use to you in your deliberations.

The National Center for Responsible Gaming was founded in 1996 to fund research on problem, pathological and underage gambling. The NCRG is a division of the Gaming Entertainment Research and Education Foundation (GEREF), a separately incorporated, independent, nonprofit organization classified as a 501 (c) (3) by the IRS. It is affiliated with the University of Missouri-Kansas City, which provides office space and services to the NCRG.

Twenty-two casino operators and gaming suppliers and one foundation have pledged \$4.9 million to the NCRG, an unprecedented level of support for research on disordered gambling behavior.¹ In fact, ours is the first national organization devoted exclusively to funding scientific, peer-reviewed research on this disorder.

Major questions remain unanswered about the nature of gambling-related disorders:

- Is pathological gambling a primary disorder? Or, is it sometimes a consequence of the other mental health problems so frequently seen in pathological gamblers?
- Why is there a high rate of comorbidity with other psychiatric disorders and addictions?
- Are the current diagnostic and screening instruments accurate?
- Does gambling at an early age predispose a person to have a gambling problem in adulthood?
- What role does genetics play in the onset of a pathological gambling disorder?

Such fundamental questions must be answered before we can develop effective prevention and treatment strategies. The NCRG's mission is to provide the necessary financial support to the institutions that have the resources and expertise to investigate and resolve these questions. Because of the parallels often drawn with research sponsored by the tobacco industry, I want to emphasize that the NCRG does not conduct its own

research. Our operations consist of a two-person administrative office that coordinates a competitive grants program designed to attract proposals from the highest caliber research universities and medical centers.

Before the establishment of the National Center for Responsible Gaming, there was no funding source--no foundation, no research organization, and no federal agency--focused on problem gambling research. Consequently, the field was under-funded and under-developed. Moreover, much of the research that had been conducted on problem gambling was not scientifically sound. It was not peer-reviewed and did not follow rigorous standards in the collection and interpretation of data. That is why the NCRG is dedicated to creating a field of disordered gambling research and a pool of outstanding researchers committed to the pursuit of scientific excellence.

To that end, we have assembled a distinguished Board of Directors that includes members such as Dr. Louis Sullivan, President of the Morehouse School of Medicine and former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services; Dr. Howard Shaffer, Director of the Division on Addictions at Harvard Medical School; Carol O'Hare, Executive Director of the Nevada Council on Problem Gambling; and Sue Cox, Executive Director of the Texas Council on Problem and Compulsive Gambling. Our bylaws state that at least 50 percent of the governing board must represent sectors other than the gaming industry.

Furthermore, the Board of Directors does *not* select the research projects supported by the NCRG. It has delegated this authority to peer review panels and the NCRG's Advisory Board. These independent bodies are composed of nationally recognized scientists such as Dr. Fred Goodwin, former director of the National Institute of Mental Health and the current director of the Center on Neuroscience, Medical Progress & Society at George Washington University Medical Center; Dr. Richard Evans, Distinguished University Professor of Psychology at the University of Houston; Dr. Mark Appelbaum, Professor of Psychology at the University of California-San Diego and editor of the journal *Psychological Methods*; and Dr. David Self, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine. These distinguished researchers follow the high standards and peer review procedures of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in evaluating grant proposals submitted to the NCRG.

In fact, we have modeled our organizational structure and decision-making procedures on the NIH as you can see in the chart included in the packet of materials about the NCRG.

Since its recent establishment, the NCRG has awarded 11 grants totaling nearly \$1.5 million. These research projects are led by an outstanding group of scientists representing the leading university and medical research centers in North America, including Harvard Medical School and the City of Hope National Medical Center.

We hold a very high opinion of NCRG's investigators, an opinion that is shared by many of the most prestigious academic bodies in the country, including one employed by the National Gambling Impact Study Commission. The National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academy of Sciences has been engaged by the Commission to study the social and economic impact of pathological gambling. This past year, the NRC

convened groups of leading experts in the field to address the committee. Ten of the presenters selected by the NRC serve as key personnel on NCRG-funded research projects: Robert Ladouceur, Université Laval; Peter Goyer and William Semple, VA Medical Center Cleveland; Howard Shaffer, Harvard Medical School; Ken Winters, University of Minnesota; David Comings, City of Hope National Medical Center; Randy Stinchfield and Roger Svendsen, Minnesota Institute of Public Health; Tony Toneatto, Addiction Research Foundation; and Lori Rugle, Trimeridian.

The National Research Council has drawn on the NCRG's work in other ways. The committee requested, and was granted, permission to use the database created by Harvard Medical School for its study of the prevalence of disordered gambling. I believe that you are aware of Dr. Howard Shaffer's groundbreaking work, "Estimating the Prevalence of Disordered Gambling Behavior in the United States and Canada: A Meta-analysis." The Harvard study was the first research project supported by NCRG. It not only provided the first reliable estimates of the prevalence of the disorder but also set new and more rigorous standards for future prevalence studies. To date, NCRG has filled nearly 2,000 requests for copies of this study.

The NCRG's Advisory Board determined at the outset that the complexity of disordered gambling behavior requires investigations from a variety of disciplines and established three main areas of inquiry for support: epidemiology, neuroscience, and behavioral and social science.

- **Epidemiology** is the scientific methodology for discerning the characteristics of a disorder and the characteristics of those who suffer from the disorder. In this domain, the NCRG continued the original grant to Harvard Medical School so that researchers, public policy makers, and the public will have access to the most up-to-date estimates of the prevalence of the disorder among both the adult general population and special populations such as youth.
- **Neuroscience** research in mental health is now exploring the role that neurobiology plays in mood disorders and addictions through brain imaging, drug trials and genetics studies. NCRG is currently funding neuroscience research projects at the City of Hope National Medical Center, the Foundation for Clinical Neuroscience Research and Education, the University of New Mexico, and the University of Minnesota School of Medicine. The findings of such cutting-edge research will have an enormous impact on how we define the disorder, how we diagnose it, how we measure its prevalence, and how we treat it. It may also offer clues to the roots of other addictive disorders. Perhaps most significantly, the neuroscience research will reveal biological markers of the disorder that will give us a gold standard against which the accuracy of screening and diagnostic instruments can be measured. For example, we do not have independent validation of the criteria used to diagnose pathological gambling in the American Psychiatric Association's DSM-IV. Neuroscience research will soon provide this gold standard.
- Recognizing that the environment also plays a crucial role in mental health disorders, the NCRG has committed funds to research in the **behavioral and social sciences**. We are currently financing experiments that will assess the efficacy of various treatment programs such as cognitive therapy. Two projects are

looking at the dynamics of youth gambling, especially risk factors for developing the disorder at an early age. One investigator is interested in whether young people involved in gambling "mature-out" in the same way that most teenagers move away from risky behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse when they reach adulthood. This research will serve as the foundation for future prevention programs. I am sure that we all agree that prevention is ultimately the most effective form of treatment.

The NCRG's next round of grant competition will occur in the spring of 1999. The Advisory Board recently reviewed 79 letters of intent and selected 49 projects to be submitted as full proposals on January 4, 1999. We expect to award a minimum of \$1.2 million during this next competition. The Request for Applications that solicited these proposals emphasized our special interest in youth gambling, prevention, and neuroscience.

One of our original objectives for the NCRG was to serve as a catalyst by encouraging other funders to support disordered gambling research. We are very proud to have already achieved this objective with the recent announcement of the first ever-funding initiative on pathological gambling by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The NCRG played a role in this development by demonstrating the enormous potential of the field for not only understanding pathological gambling, but also for illuminating addictive disorders in general.

Because continuing dialogue with NIH is vital to fulfilling our mandate, the NCRG will cosponsor a one-day conference with George Washington University Medical Center in Washington, D.C. on February 5, 1999. All of the NCRG's investigators will convene, for the first time, to discuss their research. The conference will feature a keynote address by Dr. Alan Leshner, Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Addiction is a Brain Disease and It Matters." We believe that it is in the interest of both the NIH and NCRG to discuss future collaboration and, therefore, have planned sessions for NCRG investigators to converse with the staff from the NIH institutes involved in the pathological gambling initiative. The conference will also introduce the work of the NCRG to foundations that support mental health and addiction research and will feature breakout session for special interests such as journalists who cover mental health, science, and gambling issues.

Madame Chairperson, the National Center for Responsible Gaming is creating a field of disordered gambling research that is gaining the respect and attracting the participation of the scientific community. Earlier this year, pioneer gambling researcher, Dr. Rachel Volberg, informed this Commission that,

Gambling researchers who have been in the field for a while have been calling for some kind of effort to fund research for many years. The NCRG is the first effort that we've seen, and I absolutely have to applaud the casino industry for coming up with that particular method, it's a peer reviewed, scientifically sound way of getting research done...ⁱⁱ

As we all know, valid, peer-reviewed, verifiable research and study conducted on problem and pathological gambling is critical to informed policy development in the area of gaming. Only the strongest science, not anecdotal evidence, should be accepted. We need scientists of the highest caliber working on this problem to ensure that the most rigorous science will guide our efforts to prevent and treat this disorder.

We are proud of the many contributions that NCRG has made and hope that the National Gambling Impact Study Commission will use the NCRG as a resource. We are pleased to extend a special invitation to the members and staff of the Commission to participate in our conference on February 5, 1999. We look forward to such opportunities for continuing this important dialogue.

Thank you for your attention. I will be pleased to answer any of your questions about the NCRG.

ⁱThe NCRG's current donors include founding contributors Boyd Gaming Corporation and Station Casinos, Inc.; and Caesars World, Circus Circus Enterprises, Inc., Grand Casinos, Inc. Hilton Hotels Corporation, International Game Technology, the Lincy Foundation, and Mirage Resorts. Other donors include Aztar Corporation, Boomtown, Inc., Casino Data Systems, Inc., Coast Resorts, Empress Riverboat Casinos, Inc., Harrah's Entertainment, Harvey's Resort, Hollywood Casino Corporation, Horseshoe Gaming, Mission Industries, Rio Suite Hotel & Casino, Showboat, Inc., Shuffle Master Gaming, Inc. Southern Wine & Spirits.

ⁱⁱRachel Volberg, Public meeting of the National Gambling Impact Study Commission (January 22, 1998).