

THE NEBRASKA COMMISSION ON PROBLEM GAMBLING

**REPORT TO THE GENERAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
OF THE NEBRASKA UNICAMERAL LEGISLATURE**

APRIL 2, 2014

Chairman Karpisek and Members of the General Affairs Committee:

The Nebraska Commission on Problem Gambling gives this report to the Committee as required by Section 4, Subsection 3, of LB 6. In June, 2013, nine commissioners were appointed by Governor Heineman, and their appointments were recently confirmed by the Legislature. The Commission began its activities on July 1, 2013, and has met to transact the business of the Gamblers Assistance Program on four occasions since then, with one more meeting scheduled before June 30, 2014.

The first year's activities of the Program have included the following:

- Entered contracts with agencies and sole providers of counseling and treatment services to Nebraska citizens suffering problem gambling disorders. These providers all carried over from the previous administration of the program within the Department of Health and Human Services. Providers are located in nine communities scattered around the state, offering service to approximately 89% of the population located within 50 miles of their respective offices.
- Recently added a new provider expanding service in North Platte.
- Continued providing crisis phone line service through the "helpline" offering immediate telephone response all day every day to callers seeking emergency assistance. These calls are answered by individuals who encourage the caller to seek and follow through with in-person counseling services offered by contracted counselors in their area.
- Received and took under consideration a proposal for counselor training to be conducted by an online internet-based program that is in early planning at Bellevue University. This institution proposes to bring its national reputation and experience in internet education programs to the field of disordered gambling treatment. The Commission is in the early stage of developing this capability.

- Provided, through the contracted counselors, approximately 700 hours per month of in-person counseling services to several hundred clients of the program throughout the state.
- Started the process of developing a data collection and analysis program that will provide factual insights into the nature and extent of problem gambling disorders in Nebraska. The Commission recognizes the growing influence of online internet-based gambling sources and the expanding penetration of problem gambling issues among our youth. Gathering facts about this subject will be a primary focus of the Commission's attention.

From the beginning, the Commission sought to continue providing the services that have been available to Nebraska citizens for over twenty years. The first priority was continuing the counseling treatment that was already underway when the new management of the program began. To do this, the Commission decided to enter the new contract with counselors on nearly identical terms to those used in the prior year, with no interruption in service.

The Commission will expand services and increase awareness of gambling-related issues through a media campaign; establishment of a website; and in-person contacts with programs and entities, such as the courts, that have encountered persons presenting with the consequences of problem gambling.

The Commission was faced with a very short window of time to organize the program home office and arrange for staff. Jerry Bauerkemper was employed on a temporary, part-time basis as director. Mr. Bauerkemper was instrumental in establishing the first problem gambling treatment programs in Nebraska. As of March 1, 2014, the Commission hired David Geier of Lincoln to fill the position of director. As office organization develops, other staff will be added.

The Commission home office has been located with space offered by the Department of Revenue at the State Office Building in Omaha. The Commission expects to seek office space in Lincoln, to make the program office more accessible to

the seat of state government and the various offices and agencies that the program interacts with.

The primary objective during this transition has been to keep ongoing services available to all Nebraskans, with no interruption. Services will expand into underserved areas of the state as funds and provider availability permit.

This year's report is necessarily short because much remains to be accomplished to put the program on a sound basis and fulfill the Legislature's intent in LB 6. The Commission expects to have a great deal more to report to the Committee next year.

David Geier, Director

For the Nebraska Commission on Problem Gambling