



Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission
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NO ONE WINS WITH PROBLEM GAMBLING

Gambling is a form of entertainment that is enjoyed by tens of millions of patrons globally, including the residents of the states and territories of the United States of America. The American Gaming Association (AGA), the casino gaming industry national trade group, recently reported that U.S. casinos had their best year ever in 2022, with over \$60B in revenues. The AGA revenue report was limited to table games and slot machines, and excluded online sports betting, internet casino games, lotteries, other forms of gambling, and illegal activities.

Under the authority of the Virgin Islands Casino and Resort Control Act of 1995, as amended, (CRCA) (Act No. 6069, Chapter 21 of Title 32 of the Virgin Islands Code), the Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission (VICCC) licenses and regulates the casinos located in the casino zone on St. Croix. The VICCC also has mandates for internet gambling and gaming and for the casinos located at the racetracks (colloquially known as racinos) on St. Croix. The VICCC's financial records show that during the years 2020, 2021, and 2022, the total amount gambled on regulated table games and slot machines on St. Croix alone, was \$216,376,759 or an average of \$72.1M per year. The local legalized gambling industry, to include the Virgin Islands Lottery, Southland Gaming, and Off Track Betting (OTB), creates hundreds of jobs and generates millions in tax dollars of which a significant portion is re-distributed to education, hospitals and health, and other direct services within the Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands. It is uncontested that the gambling industry is important to the economic wellbeing of our territory.

Most people gamble responsibly. However, those in the gambling industry, including casino operators and regulators, acknowledge an obligation to raise awareness of the negative consequences that occur when gambling moves from entertainment to addiction. Problem gambling is defined as "all gambling behavior patterns that compromise, disrupt, or damage personal, family and vocational pursuits." The symptoms include (1) increasing preoccupation with gambling; (2) a need to bet more money more frequently; (3) restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop gambling; (4) chasing losses; and (5) loss of control seen by continuation of the gambling behavior despite mounting serious negative consequences. In extreme cases, problem gambling can result in financial ruin, legal problems, loss of family, career, or freedom, and even suicide. Problem gambling is a public health issue that affects all ages, races, and ethnic backgrounds and, sadly, many cases go undetected or untreated. The National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG), a national non-profit that serves as an advocate for problem gamblers and their families while maintaining a neutral position regarding legalized gambling, reports that 2 million U.S. adults are estimated to meet the criteria for severe problem gambling in a given year and another 4-6 million U.S. adults would be considered to have a mild or moderate

gambling problem. The NCPG research also shows that young people are more likely than adults to develop issues related to gambling.

While there are no statistics for the U.S. Virgin Islands, if even one of our patrons is a problem gambler, such behavior has damaging economical and societal costs. The NCPG estimates that, on average, an individual affected by gambling addiction impacts an additional seven to twenty persons in their families and communities! The NCPG further estimates that the annual national social cost associated with problem gambling is \$7B for gambling-related criminal justice, healthcare spending, job loss, bankruptcy, and other consequences. Therefore, the VICCC joins in the NCPG's grassroot campaign that each March seeks to raise public awareness of problem gambling and to inform that hope and help, without stigma and shame, exist, is available 24/7/365, and is free and confidential. Problem gambling is treatable by therapy, medication, and self-help groups. Treatment is effective in minimizing or eliminating the adverse effects of gambling addiction.

At the VICCC's request, the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. issued a Proclamation on February 28, 2023, declaring March 2023 as Problem Gambling Awareness Month (PGAM). During this observation, and beyond, under the leadership of the VICCC's Vice Chair, Commissioner Carolyn Hermon-Percell, the VICCC is informing all Virgin Islanders about problem gambling by distributing consumer education resources; by including the national helplines (Call/Text: 1-800-522-4700 or 1-800-GAMBLER; Chat: www.ncpgambling.org/chat) on the VICCC's website, on banners placed in highly traversed areas on St. Croix and St. Thomas, on giveaways, and in public service announcements aired territory-wide; and by appearing on local talk radio programs. The VICCC also offers a voluntary self-exclusion program wherein a patron can apply to be prohibited from entering all casinos for a period between one to three years. The VICCC has recently revised the self-exclusion policy to require a mandatory minimum period of six months on the self-exclusion list. Additionally, the VICCC has initiated discussions that will result in a portion of the one percent (1%) of the casino revenues allocated to the VICCC for gambling addiction programs being used to develop counseling services and grants to persons who are interested in being certified as gambling addiction counselors. Finally, the VICCC encourages its partners, casinos and other gambling and gaming establishments, public health agencies, treatment providers, advocacy groups, and other key stakeholders to join in PGAM, as they deem appropriate, to raise awareness and promote treatment.

In his Proclamation, Governor Bryan recognized that "the Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission has taken the lead in the U.S. Virgin Islands to combat problem gambling." This is so because the Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission firmly maintains that "no one wins with problem gambling."

Marvin L. Pickering, CFE, EA
Chairman/Chief Executive Officer
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