

1 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Gini Fellows?

2 MS. FELLOWS: Madam Chair and commission members,
3 thank you for allowing me to address you this afternoon.

4 As the chair of the board of directors of the
5 Mississippi Council on Problem and Compulsive Gambling, and as a
6 clinician, I have learned to appreciate the economic developments
7 that have occurred in our state. I also appreciate the problems
8 that individuals and their families have experienced due to the
9 addiction to gambling.

10 Compulsive gamblers are not morally weak-willed
11 individuals. They are people who have a chronic and progressive
12 disease. Gambling has been a part of the Mississippi culture
13 since the state was founded. In the '50s, attempts were made to
14 stop illegal gambling.

15 I am aware that many forms of illegal gambling never
16 did stop. The difference in the past six years is that gambling
17 is legal and regulated.

18 I have worked primarily in the addictions field for
19 14 years. During that time, I have known individuals and
20 families who suffer from the consequences of addiction to
21 alcohol, drugs, gambling, sex, food and religion.

22 No one makes a conscious decision to become addicted
23 to any substance or any behavior. The consequences of
24 pathological gambling are similar to the other addictions.

25 In January 1996, the Mississippi Council on Problem
26 and Compulsive Gambling organized with funding from all of the
27 casinos, which was \$150,000; the legislature, \$100,000, which
28 comes through the Mississippi Gaming Commission; and then from
29 private donations.

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1 Since its inception, the council has operated 24-hour
2 toll-free help line which has received more than 2,000 calls over
3 the last two years; trained 200 counselors to treat compulsive
4 gamblers, certifying eight; conducting four training workshops
5 for the clergy; completed a prevalent study and increased public
6 awareness through billboards, posters, brochures and public
7 service announcements.

8 The council is in the process of developing and
9 implementing a youth education and awareness campaign to be
10 implemented within the school system. In addition, we have
11 developed an Internet web site, themississippigambler.org, which
12 is a resource site for students and teachers researching
13 information pertaining to gambling addiction.

14 The majority of compulsive gamblers begin gambling as
15 children or adolescents, pitching pennies, marbles, cards, dice
16 and sports betting. Teachers and school administrators need to
17 recognize these behaviors and attempt to prevent future problems.

18 As a clinician, the problem that I have experienced
19 with accessing treatment for those suffering from the disease of
20 pathological gambling is insurance coverage: Unless there is a
21 co-morbid disorder, insurance companies and managed care will not
22 cover pathological gambling. This is a disease similar to the
23 other addictions and receives no coverage.

24 I think that the insurance industry needs to take
25 responsibility for full coverage of the individuals they insure,
26 no matter what the disease.

27 It is my opinion that the following issues need to be
28 addressed regarding problem and compulsive gambling: prevention

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1 education for teachers, adolescents and senior citizens,
2 prevention education of casino employees.

3 In fact, all employers in the state of Mississippi
4 need to offer prevention education to their employees, and
5 insurance coverage for individuals and families suffering from
6 the disease of pathological gambling. Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Thank you very much.

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