CHAIRPERSON JAMES:

Mr. Brad Hill? Scott Sternburg?

Can I ask that the next seven speakers, and you should have the list in front of you, go ahead and move over,
so we can get a sense of who is here and who is not?

Thank you.

Mr. Forman?

MR. FORMAN: Good afternoon. Madame Chair and fellow Commissioners, I am Dana Forman, a writer for the Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling.

I understand there are two ways for governments to raise large amounts of revenues, number one through taxes, number two through legalized gambling, and that of the two, gambling is considered painless. The problem is, four or five percent of the general population cannot gamble in safety.

Over the past several years, I've listened to problem gamblers share their experiences, many have stories of devastation and to alcoholics and drug addicts, many have been dually addicted. I've heard people say, it was very hard giving up the booze and the drugs, but this gambling business is impossible. The reason, after alcoholics and drug abusers have taken their 14 and 15th drink or pill or hit, they are bound to get sick or pass out. But when gamblers place their 14th or 15th bet, they actually have a chance of recouping their losses. And that is the insidious hook
which makes quitting the addiction exceedingly difficult.

Some gamblers seek help only after hitting bottom, much like the alcoholic who is arrested for a crime while under the influence, or the drug addict who overdoses. Recently, I talked with a man in his 20s who rang up a $50 thousand tab with a notorious underworld figure. When the man couldn't pay, his life was threatened. The last I heard, he was on the run in another part of the country.

Several times I've heard stories of gamblers who lost not one, but two and three cars, not one, but two and three houses, not one but two and three businesses, and not one but two and three spouses. I've heard stories of parents cashing in their children's savings bonds and robbing their piggy banks.

I've heard of parents en route to the fast food restaurant who stopped first at the convenience store for scratch tickets, after the last dollar was gone, the kids in the car were hungry or the kids went without clothes or diapers or medical care or toothpaste, you plug in the necessity.
I've once heard the story of a young mother who sold custody of her young child to her husband, in exchange for a gambling stake of $3,000.

Compulsive gamblers risk a lot more than money, they can lose their emotional stability, their mental health, their spirituality, their physical health, their freedom and sometimes their lives, when the thought of suicide appears more appealing than facing the emotional and financial wreckage.

Massachusetts has a population of about six million. Let's say there are about three million adults. If only four percent have a gambling problem, that's a 120,000, that's a 120,000 people that will take good money, intended for normal expenditures like mortgages and rents, health care, car repairs, insurance, education, clothes, vacations et cetera, and flush it down an economic black hole.

If you want to see first hand the effects of gambling on a neighborhood, take a ride a few miles north of Boston to the city of Revere and check out the houses near Wonderland dog track, the Shirley Avenue section, which 20 years ago was a respectable middle class neighborhood, is now a virtual slum. Certainly there were other contributing factors but that track
sucked, and continues to suck, the economic lifeblood out of that community.

CHAIRPERSON JAMES: Thank you. I'm going to ask you to stop there and submit the rest of your testimony in writing and we will review it.

MR. FORMAN: Thank you for letting me speak.

CHAIRPERSON JAMES: Thank you.