An Interview with Chairman Stephen Crosby

In November 2011, when legislation was passed to bring casino gambling to Massachusetts, one of the Commonwealth’s foremost priorities was to form the Massachusetts Gaming Commission (MGC). The mission of the MGC is to create a fair, transparent and participatory process for implementing the law. In creating the process, the Commission strives to ensure that its decision-making and regulatory systems engender the confidence of the public.

The five-commissioner team (Chairman Steve Crosby; Commissioner Gayle Cameron; Commissioner James F. McHugh; Commissioner Bruce F. Stebbins and Commissioner Enrique Zuniga) plans to do this, through the launch of community engagement initiatives designed to give the public an opportunity to participate in the process of regulating expanded gaming across the Commonwealth.

Over the course of the summer, the Commission held five educational forums on critical gaming topics, including problem gambling. The Commission worked with the Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling to plan the event entitled, the Massachusetts Gaming Commission Educational Forum to Address Issues Related to Problem Gambling, which was held at North Shore Community College in Lynn.

In addition to people in recovery with gambling problems, who bravely and graciously shared their personal stories and struggles with the disorder, an esteemed panel of experts in the areas of treatment, research and academics were featured at the forum. Panelists included Gemini Research President, Dr. Rachel A. Volberg; Harvard Medical School Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Dr. Debi LaPlante; Gaming Laboratories International, Inc. General Counsel and Director of Government Affairs, Kevin Mullally; and Iowa Department of Public Health, Director of the Office of Problem Gambling Treatment and Prevention, Mark Vander Linden.

Together the speakers educated the MGC and the public about the current status of problem gambling in the Commonwealth, as well as treatment resources available. They highlighted critical information for the Commission to consider as the process of expanded gambling moves forward, including such issues as the importance of using research to inform decisions, and helping to protect frequent casino patrons who exhibit signs of problem gambling behavior.

Mass. Council Communications Director, Margot Cahoon, recently had the opportunity to interview Chairman Crosby about what the Commission had learned from the educational forums, and its plans for the future.

Q. (Margot Cahoon) What are the main objectives of the Commission?

A. (Chairman Crosby) By far the Commission’s overriding objective is to conduct the licensing process in a way that is participatory, transparent and fair. We are striving to ensure that the casinos will provide the greatest possible economic development benefits and revenues to the people of the Commonwealth, reduce to the maximum extent possible the potentially negative or unintended consequences of the new legislation, and allow an appropriate return on investment for gaming providers that assures the operation of casino-resorts of the highest quality.

(Continued on p2)
Dear Friends,

I am pleased to announce, that at the end of the 2012 fiscal year it became official…Governor Patrick signed the FY2013 budget with problem gambling services funded at $1,830,000. This is the largest line item that problem gambling services has ever received in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts!

Thank you for your vision, hard work and belief that this would happen. I particularly want to express my gratitude to the Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling Board of Directors and staff members. I also want to thank all of the Legislators who have been exploring a wide variety of gambling issues this year, from the casino compact to cyber café legislation, and who have in turn fought for services for people experiencing problems with gambling.

I would be remiss not to express special thanks to Speaker of the House, Robert DeLeo; Chair, House Ways and Means Committee, Brian Dempsey; Vice Chair, Joint Committee on Public Service, Jennifer Flanagan; Senate President, Theresee Murray; Chair, Senate Ways and Means Committee, Stephen Brewer; State Representative, Ruth Balsey, 12th Middlesex District; State Representative, Kathleen Reinstein, Revere; State Representative, John D. Keenan, Salem; State Senator, John F. Keenan, Norfolk and Plymouth District; and State Senator, Anthony Petruccelli, First Suffolk and Middlesex District.

As you know, the Council has been the Commonwealth’s problem gambling services provider for 29 years. We provide education, public awareness, helpline access, treatment support, and recovery services to the people of the Commonwealth struggling with gambling disorders.

This fall we have turned our attention to the careful planning and implementation to best use these additional dollars to strengthen current programs and to develop new systems that build the capacity of the prevention, intervention and treatment systems in Massachusetts.

Some of the FY13 highlights that you can anticipate will include:

- Regional professional training opportunities for clinicians (see p3)
- Weekend retreat for people in early recovery (see announcement on page 4)
- Data collection and data dissemination projects, including, but not limited to: a statewide public opinion poll, an insurance survey, data on population-specific gambling disorders, and updated fact sheets

We are excited about the opportunity to work with you moving forward and to reaching more people experiencing problems than ever before with messages of help and hope. The Council always needs people who are willing to share their personal experiences with problem gambling and those willing to make calls to legislators on important public policy issues. Please let us know if you might be interested and thank you again for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Marlene D. Warner, MA
Executive Director

Mass. Council Wins Website Award at National Conference

The Mass. Council was honored with the Website Award at the National Council on Problem Gambling’s annual conference held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin from July 12 to 14, 2012. We received the award for our new teen site, Teens Know Your Limits (teensknowyourlimits.org).

“TKYL is a powerful tool for communicating with an audience that is often difficult to reach,” says Keith Whyte, Executive Director of the National Council, “It provides a fun, interactive, yet fact-filled platform for youth. We congratulate the Mass. Council and their partners for building such a great site. It is a model for efforts across the country.”

You can check out the teen site at www.teensknowyourlimits.org or find it on facebook at www.facebook.com/teensknowyourlimits.

Help the Council to Save Valuable Resources

Please consider signing up to receive news via email. It’s as simple as visiting our website at http://www.masscompulsivegambling.org/news/newsletters.php or calling 617-426-4554.
In late June, the Council convened a meeting of the Massachusetts Partnership on Responsible Gambling at the State Lottery offices in Braintree.

Attendees included: Paul Sternburg, Brian Donelan and Jeani Caron from the Massachusetts State Lottery; Michael Corfman and Van Narayan from Casino City Press; Steve Ryan from the Convenience Store Association; Jonathan Little from Ameristar Casinos; Paul Brody from Mohegan Sun; Steve O’Toole from Plainridge Racecourse; Allen Flagg from Harmony Healthcare Inc; Paul Evans and Christian Teja from Suffolk Downs; Gayle Cameron from the Massachusetts Gambling Commission; and Pierre Gabriel, Marlene Warner, Karen Sicher and Margot Cahoon from the Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling.

Marlene Warner, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling welcomed the group and shared the history of the Council, its programs and services, as well as its position regarding expanded gambling policy. She also discussed the criteria that clinicians use to determine problems. And she introduced best practices in regards to problem gambling treatment professionals working with the gambling industry in the USA and Canada, both in terms of taking responsibility for patrons who were experiencing problems and working to minimize risks to those individuals.

One of the exercises that the group participated in was brainstorming an updated mission, vision, and proposed projects for the Partnership with the new reality of expanded gambling. Some of the ideas discussed included training employees at casinos in efforts to minimize harms, advocating for education and treatment and increasing public awareness. The group also talked about better incorporating problem gambling services into mental health and substance abuse agencies, the need for more certified therapists and about developing an integrated system of best practices.

Paul Evans, Vice President of Security and Compliance at Suffolk Downs and Brian Donelan, Employee Assistance Program Coordinator for the Massachusetts State Lottery, pictured together at the meeting.

Afterwards, Deb, a recovering compulsive gambler shared her personal story with the group. She was addicted to video poker. One night, while at the casino, a woman asked her to attend a Gamblers Anonymous meeting and Deb says that it was the best thing she ever did. She said that she feels the key to preventing problems with gambling is education. And that while kids know that alcohol and drugs are addicting, they aren’t aware that gambling can also become addictive.

At the conclusion of the meeting the group talked about future plans. When asked what each person would like to see in the future of the partnership and the Council some of the comments included: Developing a way to collect data so that results are data driven; determining what onsite treatment centers at the casino should look like; and training staff to understand how to intervene when they observe people who are struggling.

Several members of the partnership also said that they would like to identify a need and work on a single task or goal together for the most impact. Many felt that this could include a prevention initiative with youth.

For more information about the Massachusetts Partnership for Responsible Gambling, please contact Marlene Warner at 617-426-4554 or marlene@masscompulsivegambling.org.

Council Offers More Training Opportunities Than Ever Before

EARN YOUR MASSACHUSETTS PROBLEM GAMBLING SPECIALIST CERTIFICATE (MA-PGS)

This year, the Council is happy to announce that it will offer more training opportunities than ever before including, an annual conference, 12 regional one-day trainings and two online trainings. Trainings are available for participants at all levels. Clinicians will learn how to incorporate problem gambling information and treatment skills into their clinical practices. Participation in the programs can lead to accreditations as problem gambling counselors, including the Massachusetts Problem Gambling Specialist (MA-PGS) Certificate.

To learn more about the certificate requirements or any of the Council’s training opportunities, please visit http://www.masscompulsivegambling.org/services/education.php or contact Council Intervention and Treatment Support Director, Victor Ortiz at 617-426-4554 / victor@masscompulsivegambling.org.

GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE:

Recovery is a Marathon
Not a Sprint

by Jim Wuefling, Prevention and Recovery at the Council

Along with several members of the staff of the Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling, I attended The International Gamblers Anonymous (GA) Conference in Quincy, Massachusetts. The theme of the conference, “Recovery is a Marathon, Not a Sprint” was both a nod to the fact that the Boston Marathon was run earlier that week and an important concept in recovery from gambling addiction. Recovery from addiction is a process, not an event, and most people in recovery believe that it is a lifelong process that takes constant vigilance to avoid relapse.

As a person in long-term recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction, I have been to numerous statewide and international Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) conferences so I was looking forward to the experience and ready to learn how the GA conference would be similar and different from AA conferences.

The first thing I noticed when I entered the conference foyer was what a happy place it was. People were warmly greeted, laughter abounded, friendships were renewed and people everywhere were celebrating each other and the joy of recovery. I knew several GA members and everyone was happy to see me and glad that I was attending.

I attended two of the morning sessions and both were wonderful. The first was an overwhelming experience. The topic was “Lost and Found” and participants spoke of what they lost through their gambling addiction and what they found in recovery. It was a standing room only crowd and the stories poignant, honest and often emotional. Most people spoke of losing themselves and their relationships and finding a new way of life. What truly amazed me was not one person spoke of losing money. I have yet to meet a recovering gambler who has not lost a ton of money but this was not the loss that every speaker addressed. It was the loss of self, one’s soul, one’s self-esteem, one’s family. In the face of all that was lost the speakers spoke of the joy of finding a new way of life and being OK with themselves again.

It was a wonderful experience – and, to me, very similar to other fellowship’s conference. The joy is in the journey and the joy was ever present at this conference. I was so glad that I went and very grateful to be accepted and welcomed.
The Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling is a private, non-profit health agency dedicated to reducing the social, financial and emotional costs of problem gambling. The Council provides prevention, information, education, advocacy, and referral services for problem gamblers, their loved ones, and the greater community.

The Council is funded in part by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Abuse Services.

Massachusetts Problem Gambling Treatment Centers

Boston ASAP, Boston: 617.482.5292
Child and Family Services, New Bedford: 508.984.5566
Community Care Services, Attleboro MA: 508-226-1660, ext. 213
The Gandara Center, Springfield: 413-732-2121 x 210
Henry Lee Willis Community Center, Worcester: 508.799.2934
Kit Clark Senior Center: 617.825.5000
Let Us Know (LUK), Inc., Fitchburg: 978-829-2244
Lowell House, Inc., Lowell: 978.459.8656
Mt. Auburn Hospital Prevention & Recovery Center, Cambridge: 617.499.5051
North Suffolk Mental Health Services, Chelsea: 888.294.7802
The Psychological Center, Lawrence: 978.685.1337
Stanley Street Treatment & Resources, Inc., Fall River: 508.679.5222
Steppingstone, Inc., Fall River: 508-679-0033
Team Coordinating Agency, Inc., Haverhill: 978.373.1181 ext. 42

Resources

Bettors Anonymous: 978.988.1777 or 781.662.5199
Department of Veterans’ Services: 888.844.2838
Division on Addictions, Cambridge Health Alliance, a teaching affiliate of Harvard Medical School: 781.306.8600
Gam-Anon (family/friends): 888.644.8482
Gamblers Anonymous MA Hotline: 888-GA HELPS (888.424.3577)
Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling Helpline: 800.426.1234
National Council on Problem Gambling Helpline: 800.522.4700

Are You Struggling WITH YOUR GAMBLING?

This March, the Council will hold its second annual Your First Step to Change: a Gambling-Free Weekend retreat. The retreat provides much needed support to individuals who are currently experiencing a problem with their gambling. It features workshops, meetings and activities aimed at introducing, addressing and encouraging recovery from problematic gambling.

Following is what one of last year’s participants had to say about her experience at the retreat: “From the beginning, I felt I was in a knowledgeable, nurturing, caring and non-judgmental environment. The retreat was very beneficial for me, I am in recovery and after this weekend I can honestly say that I will stay this way.”

Scholarships are available. For more information, please contact Council Intervention and Treatment Director, Victor Ortiz at victor@masscompulsivegambling.org or 617-426-4554.

Seeking New T.A.G. Teams

T.A.G. (Teens about Gambling) is a peer lead student group that works to educate fellow teens about the risks involved with gambling. T.A.G. students are very knowledgeable about problem gambling and offer presentations and trainings to both teens and adults. T.A.G. members have the opportunity to help the Mass. Council reach other students with prevention of problem gambling messages in many ways, from speaking at events to helping to develop videos and programs for younger kids. For more information about starting a T.A.G. Team at your school, please email Jim Wuelfing at jim@masscompulsivegambling.org.