

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2163

As Reported By House Committee On:

Commerce & Labor

Title: An act relating to creating a program for compulsive gambling education and awareness.

Brief Description: Creating a program for compulsive gambling education and awareness.

Sponsors: Representatives Wood, Conway, Clements, McIntire and Veloria.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Commerce & Labor: 2/22/99, 3/1/99 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates the Joint Select Committee on Problem Gambling with eight members, four from the House Commerce and Labor Committee and four from the Senate Commerce, Trade, Housing and Financial Institutions Committee.
- Report to the Legislature by December 1, 1999.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE & LABOR

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Clements, Republican Co-Chair; Conway, Democratic Co-Chair; Wood, Democratic Vice Chair; Hurst and McIntire.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives B. Chandler, Republican Vice Chair; Lisk and McMorris.

Staff: Pam Madson (786-7166).

Background: Since 1992, several studies and reports have focused attention on the issue of problem gambling. In 1993, the Lottery Commission funded a study on

problem gambling among adults and adolescents. An update of this study will be completed in 1999.

There are efforts within the state to raise the awareness of problem gambling. The Washington state affiliate of the National Council on Problem Gambling offers a toll-free help line as well as other educational services for the problem gambler. The council also works to raise the awareness of gambling addiction among professionals involved in treating addictive behavior. The council does not provide actual treatment.

There are a limited number of mental health professionals in this state who have specific training on the identification and treatment of compulsive gambling. There are no publicly or privately funded inpatient or outpatient treatment programs for compulsive gamblers in Washington. Gamblers Anonymous has had a presence in Washington since 1961.

The Gambling Commission, the Lottery Commission and the Horse Racing Commission are directed to develop and display through their licensees and retail outlets, informational material on problem gambling. These agencies also contribute to the annual support of the state council's operations. Many of the tribes operating casinos in Washington have made some contribution to the council.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Joint Select Committee on Problem Gambling is established. Committee membership includes four members from the House Commerce & Labor Committee and four members from the Senate Commerce, Trade, Housing and Financial Institutions Committee. The committee will review: (1) The need for programs addressing problem gambling and the appropriate industry response; (2) the need to target youth issues; (3) the appropriate level of service from the help line for problem gamblers and their families; and (4) the appropriate level of public funding for treatment. The committee may consult with appropriate state agencies, the gambling industry, nonprofit organizations such as the State Council on Problem Gambling, community mental health organizations, and tribal governments involved in gaming. The committee must report to the Legislature by December 1, 1999. The committee terminates July 1, 2000.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The direction to the Gambling Commission, the Lottery Commission and the Horse Racing Commission to implement educational and treatment programs for problem gamblers and to fund these efforts is replaced with the creation of the Joint Select Committee on Problem Gambling.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (Original bill) There is a need for services to help people and their families with compulsive gambling. There is very little available in the way of treatment. All gambling interests should participate in finding solutions. The three commissions dealing with gambling activity do contribute to educational efforts and help support the State Council on Problem Gambling. Though agencies are supportive of the effort to help problem gamblers, in the area of treatment, the current regulatory agencies and the Lottery Commission may not be the most appropriate agencies to deal with treatment programs. Expertise from agencies such as the Department of Social and Health Services and the Department of Health may need to be included. The funding mechanism provided in the bill may not produce the expected revenue for this effort. Currently no money would be generated from the Horse Racing Commission, and the Gambling Commission surplus will decrease until very little will be generated by the formula in the bill for this effort.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (Original bill) Representative Alex Wood, prime sponsor; Ed Fleisher, Washington State Gambling Commission; Vito Chiechi, Recreational Gaming Association; Michael Transue, Washington Restaurant Association; and Bruce Batson, Washington Horse Racing Commission.