

SENATE BILL REPORT

E2SHB 2776

As of March 5, 2004

Title: An act relating to the treatment of problem gambling.

Brief Description: Concerning problem gambling.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Cody, McCoy, Conway, Wood, Hudgins, Crouse, Kagi, Kenney, McMorris, Murray and McIntire).

Brief History:

Staff: Catherine Suter (786-7442)

Background: A 1999 study commissioned and funded by the Washington State Lottery Commission found that 5.1 percent of the Washington adult population had experienced gambling problems or compulsive gambling at some point in their lives, with 2.3 percent reporting such difficulties in the year immediately preceding the survey. A similar study also completed in 1999 by the Lottery Commission indicated that 7.5 percent of adolescents were at risk of developing gambling problems and 0.9 percent were problem gamblers.

In 2002, in legislation authorizing Washington participation in a multi-state lottery, the Legislature established a program for the treatment of pathological gambling in the Department of Social and Health Services. The program is to serve people wanting treatment but unable to afford it. Treatment under the program is limited to funds available to the department.

The Legislature provided \$500,000 in revenue from the multi-state lottery for this program in FY 2003 only. The pathological gambling program operated for nine months, from October 2002 through June 2003, subsidizing treatment for 203 problem gamblers and providing training on treatment of problem gambling for 25 mental health professionals. The program is not currently funded.

The Gambling Commission contributes funding for a problem gambling hot-line and signs that are posted in establishments that conduct gambling activities advertising the hot-line telephone number.

Summary of Bill: The purpose of the department's gambling program is broadened to cover:

- prevention and treatment for problem gambling, broadly defined to include both compulsive and under-age gambling; and
- training of professionals in identification and treatment of problem gambling.

The Problem Gambling Treatment Account is established in the state treasury. Funds in the account are to be spent for the purposes of the department's problem gambling program.

The Legislature is authorized to make transfers from the excess fund balances of the Gambling Revolving Fund and the State Lottery Account to the Problem Gambling Treatment Account during the 2003-2005 biennium. Of any transfer from the Gambling Revolving Fund, half must come from tribal gaming establishments and half from commercial gambling establishments regulated by the Gambling Commission.

A joint legislative task force on problem gambling is established. There are nine voting members of the task force, including one individual representing the Governor and eight legislators, two each from the two largest caucuses of the House and the Senate. There are, in addition, nine nonvoting members, including the following: one representing gambling establishments operated by federally recognized tribes; one representing commercial gambling establishments regulated by the commission; one representing a nonprofit organization involved in prevention and/or treatment of problem gambling; two representing the public; and three liaison representatives, one each from the commission, the Lottery Commission, the Horse Racing Commission and the department. With the exception of the agency liaisons, nonvoting members are appointed jointly by the President of the Senate and the speaker of the House. The tribes are to be consulted regarding appointment of a tribal gambling establishment representative.

The task force is directed to make recommendations to the Legislature by December 1, 2004, regarding the scope of the need for problem gambling treatment; a mechanism for equitable contributions, by all who conduct gambling activities, to funding for treatment of problem gambling; and a mechanism to ensure that funding for treatment of problem gambling increases in proportion to increases in gambling activities.

The bill may be cited as "Ben's bill."

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 5, 2004.

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