



Virginia Society of Addiction Medicine

A Chapter of American Society of Addiction Medicine

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February 23, 2026

Re: VASAM's Opposition to HB 161/SB 118, Legalizing Internet Gaming

Dear Honorable State Lawmakers:

On behalf of the Virginia Society of Addiction Medicine (VASAM), the leading medical specialty society representing physicians and clinicians in Virginia who specialize in the prevention, treatment, and recovery from addiction, thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important topic. **We write to express our strong opposition to HB 161/SB 118.** This legislation would legalize internet gaming (iGaming) in our state.

In short, we believe the risks posed by expanded iGaming far outweigh the benefits:

Problematic gambling and gambling addiction is on the rise nationwide.^{1 2} The expansion of highly addictive iGaming in our state would only add fuel to that fire. Gambling addiction is a recognized psychiatric disorder under the American Psychiatric Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) V.³ Gambling addiction shares similar mechanisms with other substance use disorders, including dopamine dysregulation and impaired executive function. Essentially, legalizing iGaming would provide vulnerable populations with constant access to an online casino on their phones. Like other forms of online gambling, iGaming utilizes aggressive algorithms designed to attract and maintain people's attention. It stands to reason that expanding access to this form on online gambling would only increase gambling addiction.

The further expansion of online gambling poses significant risks to the health and wellness of Virginians. The data is clear: states who expand online gambling open the door to several public health and financial challenges. Indeed, research indicates that Americans living in states with legalized internet gaming face increased bankruptcies, higher credit card debt, and lower overall access to much needed credit.⁴ This trend is especially acute among lower-income and younger populations.⁵ Further, states that expand online gambling predicably face a sharp increase in problematic gambling behavior. Research even shows that more problematic gambling is linked to higher rates of intimate partner violence.⁶

Problematic gambling and gambling addiction result in many societal downsides. We fear that these negative impacts would be supercharged if iGaming were to become legal in Virginia.

Virginia faces an incredibly consequential decision in legalizing iGaming. **As such, we urge lawmakers to take a step back and consider the full range of consequences that iGaming legalization will have on our state.** While legalization may raise revenue in the short term, it will have many long-term negative impacts on our fellow residents. No increase in revenue is worth this price tag. **For these reasons, we oppose HB 161/SB 118 and urge lawmakers to vote against its advancement.**

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to reach out directly to myself or any of our leadership officers if you have any questions or concerns. We are happy to assist you.

Sincerely,

Lauren Grawert, MD, FASAM

¹ Rose-Berman, I. (2025). The rise of sports betting is a growing public health crisis. STAT. <https://www.statnews.com/2025/11/11/sports-betting-apps-public-health-crisis/>

² Schmitt, K. (2025). As Online Betting Surges, So Does Risk of Addiction | Hopkins Bloomberg Public Health Magazine. <https://magazine.publichealth.jhu.edu/2025/online-betting-surges-so-does-risk-addiction>

³ American Psychiatric Association. (2024). What is Gambling Disorder? <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gambling-disorder/what-is-gambling-disorder>

⁴ Gill, D. (2026). As states permitted online sports gambling, citizens' Personal Financial Health suffered. UCLA Anderson Review. <https://anderson-review.ucla.edu/as-states-permitted-online-sports-gambling-citizens-personal-financial-health-suffered/>

⁵ Baker, S., Balthrop, J., Johnson, M., Kotter, J., & Pisciotta, K. (2024). Gambling Away Stability: Sports Betting's Impact on Vulnerable Households. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w33108>

⁶ Dowling, N., Suomi, A., Jackson, A., Lavis, T., Patford, J., Cockman, S., Thomas, S., Bellringer, M., Koziol-Mclain, J., Battersby, M., Harvey, P., & Abbott, M. (2014). Problem Gambling and Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. Trauma Violence Abuse, 17(1), 43–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838014561269>