



Problem Gambling Helpline Calls Hit Record 12,946

For Immediate Release

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(Green Bay, WI) – With a down economy and gambling popularity continuing to increase, Wisconsin’s Problem Gambling Helpline received a record number of calls in 2008.

Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling Executive Director Rose Gruber says Helpline calls reached 12,946 last year, an increase of 38.6% from 2007 and 28.9% higher than the previous record of 10,043 set in 2005.

“Certainly, the economy may be one factor, along with increased access to gaming,” Gruber said. “At the same time, we are becoming more effective at getting the word out about the services that are available for those who face gambling issues.”

While the total number of calls in 2008 is significantly higher than any previous year, Gruber cautions that the total really only tells part of the story. In 2008, the average debt reported was just more than \$36,000. “That really shows that most callers have significant debt before they reach out for help,” Gruber said. “And it’s not just the gambler who’s affected. It’s also his or her family, friends and even co-workers and employers who are impacted.”

Gruber notes that because of confidentiality issues, the Helpline report statistics are based on callers who are willing to share information.

“We really don’t expect the pace of calls to drop off since we typically see a spike in calls early in the year, following the holidays and leading up to the Super Bowl,” Gruber said. “We did see that spike in January of last year, but the average number of calls per month remained fairly high throughout the year.” Monthly Helpline calls in 2008 ranged from a monthly record of 1,434 in January to a low of 809 in May.

Helpline calls last year also remained split fairly evenly between males and females. “That’s been the trend in recent years,” Gruber said. “When the Helpline was created in 1996, there

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were far more calls from males than females.” Gruber adds that the average female caller in 2008 was 47 years old, while the average male caller was 39.

WCPG estimates that five percent to seven percent of Wisconsin's population – or about 332,000 people – are problem or compulsive gamblers.

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The Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling is funded by a public awareness grant from the State of Wisconsin and additional funding from donors, including Wisconsin Native American Tribes. The Council operates a 24-hour Helpline at 1-800-GAMBLE-5, distributes informational brochures, organizes an annual statewide conference, makes presentations on problem gambling and conducts training sessions for treatment providers interested in the special requirements for working with compulsive gamblers and their families. For more information visit www.wi-problemgamblers.org.

If you or someone you know has a gambling problem, call the Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling Helpline at 1-800-GAMBLE-5 for confidential help.

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