



March 24, 2020

Governor Tim Walz

via email

Dear Governor,

Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance is Minnesota's advocate for problem gamblers, I am writing out of sheer frustration with DHS's extremely slow response to allowing the 19-state approved problem gambling providers the ability to offer teletherapy services to their clients and their groups. I have been communicating with the Problem Gambling Division at DHS as well as Maisha Giles, Director of Behavioral Health and the response has been less than satisfactory. My reading of the Governor's Executive Order 20-12 gives DHS permission to waive its rules on offering telehealth.

I was on a webinar this morning with the National Council on Problem Gambling and they talked extensively about the waivers on teletherapy and its importance to the continuity of care. Gamblers overall have poorer health and struggle with financial obligations. We know that those with addictions may experience an increase in anxiety and depression due to the stresses presented by Covid -19. MN sets aside funds from the Lottery and Charitable Gambling to offer no cost treatment to gamblers and their families. Permitting counselors to be reimbursed for these services should fall within this executive order. I believe, as I think the Governor does as well, we owe a high duty of care to those who are most vulnerable. Over 160,000 Minnesotans struggle with problematic gambling. An addiction that is well hidden and often dismissed, though it presents similarly to alcohol and drug addictions.

I realize there are so many needs you and your office are trying to address. We are quite concerned for the mental well-being for those with gambling disorders who happen to experience the highest level of suicide of all addictions. Our fear is that as this crisis continues to require us to remain physically apart and telehealth is not approved, we will have many Minnesotans who will not be able to maintain their course of recovery. We're already seeing a spike in online gambling. These sites are not regulated like casinos and are quite predatory. As a means of protection, NPGA is offering free subscriptions to Minnesota residents who wish to block online gambling from their electronic devices.

Thank you all for your ceaseless efforts to provide Minnesotans the best care under such dire circumstances.

Be well,

Susan Sheridan Tucker, Executive Director, Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance