

THE HOUR

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## Gambling has 'devastating' effect on youth

### To the Editor:

Problem gambling has devastating effects on the lives of youth, families and older adults. This addictive behavior is often overshadowed by addictions to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Nationwide, 6 to 9 million people (3-4% of adults) met criteria for a gambling problem. Unlike alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, there are no Federal agencies with a formal responsibility for addressing problem gambling.

The estimated social cost to families and communities from gambling-related bankruptcy, divorce, crime and job loss was almost \$7 billion last year.

The Connecticut Prevention Network strongly supports "The Comprehensive Problem Gambling Act of 2009" which seeks to

amend the Public Health Service Act to specifically include problem and pathological gambling in programs of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). It will establish a national program to address the harmful consequences of problem gambling.

Part of this Act, if passed, will appropriate up to \$71 million for grants to state health agencies, tribes, universities and non-profits to support problem gambling prevention, treatment and research programs. This legislation will provide the first-ever Federal support for programs at the state level that currently strain to handle the devastating consequences of this addiction — from bankruptcy, divorce, job loss, incarceration, depression and

despair to a high rate of suicidal behavior.

The Connecticut Prevention Network is, a group of the state's 14 community partnership Regional Action Councils that work to provide communities with education, training, and advocacy for substance abuse and gambling prevention. The Mid-Fairfield Substance Abuse Coalition (MFSAC) provides support to the communities of Norwalk, Westport, Weston, and Wilton. See [www.ctprevention.org](http://www.ctprevention.org) for more information.

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