



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 31, 2011

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Contacts to the Florida Problem Gambling Helpline for 2010-2011 Continued to Increase as State Supported Programs and Services Were Being Cut

October 31, 2011, Altamonte Springs, FL – Data from the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling’s (FCCG) HelpLine for the past year (2010/2011) reflects an increase of over 18% in contacts over the previous year, further substantiating the growing need for problem gambling education and prevention programming for Floridians. The FCCG received 16,629 contacts to its 24-Hour, toll free, problem gambling HelpLine 888-ADMIT-IT during 2010/2011, with over 5,800 of those being requests for help and information for a gambling problem, and representing an 18% increase over the previous year and a 57% increase over the past five years. While the State is considering authorizing mega resort casinos in Florida, the largest expansion of gambling in its history, the funding provided to minimize the negative impacts of gambling is ending.

According to Pat Fowler, FCCG Executive Director, “As a result of both the expansion of gambling in the state and the accessibility of gambling locations, more and more Floridians will continue to need assistance due to gambling problems, and programs in place to educate and prevent problems developing in the first place. It should not be our goal in the state to simply offer treatment to compulsive gamblers after the addiction has developed, but rather to take a responsible position and try to minimize the development of such problems initially, through broad based awareness, education and prevention programming.”

Problems reported by callers in year 2010-2011 included:

- **Crime**- 35% reported they resorted to committing illegal acts to finance their gambling representing a 3% increase over the previous year and a 12% increase over the past 5 years.
- **Unemployed/Public Assistance**- 25% reported they were unemployed and/or collecting state assistance, a 4% increase over the previous year, also representing a 12% increase over the past 5 years.
- **Suicide** – Those reporting having suicidal ideation or attempts rose significantly from 11% to 16% of callers.
- **Primary Gambling Problem** – The most frequently cited primary gambling problem was
Slots – 46% Cards – 33% Lottery – 11%

(In addition, Lottery games were the number one secondary gambling problem as stated by 57% of callers)

- Most callers reside in South Florida (42%) and 66% indicate they gamble at land based facilities. Additionally, callers reporting their problem was gambling at Internet Sweepstakes Centers increased 79% over the previous year.

The cost of gambling addiction is substantial to both communities and the State and according to research, Florida has in excess of 500,000 citizens experiencing serious to severe gambling problems. Research also indicates that each problem gambler costs taxpayers \$3,222, and each pathological gambler cost taxpayers \$11,304.

“The cost to provide public awareness, education, and prevention makes considerably more economic and human sense than the position policymakers have taken in not funding programs at all. The state receives billions of dollars annually from gambling through the lottery and other forms of legalized gambling in the state. The state is also in the business of gambling with provision, promotion, and marketing of the Florida Lottery and as such, has a greater responsibility to do everything it can to minimize the negative impacts this policy results in. To discuss further expansion of gambling ,given research findings and the increasing number of Floridians seeking help for a gambling addiction, would not represent responsible policymaking and should not even be a consideration”, says Fowler.