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Campaign Targets Families of Problem Gamblers

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A woman breaks down over the phone line, telling a helpline counselor how she lost her home because of her husband's gambling addiction. "I didn't even know we were behind in payments....somebody just showed up with a sign that said "For Public Auction". Her husband had all the bills diverted to a secret PO Box, and all the collections calls forwarded to his cell phone. Another caller says his wife always handled the bills, and he assumed they were paid until a credit check

revealed they were over \$25,000 in debt. "We have nothing to show for it....she lost it all at a casino." Helpline counselors with the state's gambling addiction program hear these stories all the time. Steve Burton, Director of the Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia, says it's crucial that family members be involved in treatment of problem gamblers. "We find higher recovery rates when the spouse or loved one has participated in the treatment too. Also, sometimes these

folks fall into a pattern of enabling the gambler without realizing it, and our counselor helps them break this pattern."

The group's new advertising campaign will focus on the importance of family in treatment. Last year the group had Candy Finnigan, one of the show's stars, train the network's counselors on the proper way to perform an intervention with a family. Callers to the 1-800-GAMBLER helpline are eligible to meet with one of these counselors for free.