

**For Immediate Release**

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**PROBLEM GAMBLING HELP-LINE RELEASES EIGHT-YEAR DATA**

*Report Describes Characteristics of State Gambling Addicts*

The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia, the group that operates the 1-800-GAMBLER help-line, has released a compilation of data on all of the callers to the help-line in the eight years since it started. According to the report, nearly 7000 people have called 1-800-Gambler help-line asking for help for a gambling problem, or to ask about getting help for a loved one with a gambling problem. Calls came in from all over the state, with the largest number, 1,141, coming from Kanawha County. This is more than twice the number of calls coming from Wood County, which was second in calls to the help-line. The data includes such factors as gender, age, type of gambling, amount of gambling debt, occupation, marital status, and educational level of the gambler.

Steve Burton, the program's director, said data is periodically compiled to give an accurate portrait of the "typical" caller to the help-line. "A lot of people have an image of a gambling addict as poor, homeless man, but this disorder really can happen to anyone. Our data shows most of our callers are married, work full time, and have at least a high school education. Half our callers are women." He also said that he has noticed an increase in the types of desperate lengths people will go to in order to get gambling money. "People have always told us that they often don't pay their bills or borrow money to gamble, but in the last couple years a lot of people have told us they have lost their house or car, or spent insurance settlement money or their inheritance on gambling, so we've started keeping track of that."

The report shows that most people in West Virginia who call the help-line are addicted to electronic gaming machines, either in local bars and restaurants, or at one of the state's four tracks. Most are in debt due to their gambling, and many admit to committing illegal acts, including writing bad checks, to finance their gambling.

Callers to the help-line receive a variety of services, including referral for a free consultation with a certified gambling counselor in their area, referrals for Gamblers Anonymous and Consumer Credit Counseling, and a mailing with a self-help manual. Those interested in help-line data can access the group's website at [1800GAMBLER.net](http://1800GAMBLER.net).