



February 26, 2026

The Honorable Abigail Spanberger
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Governor Spanberger:

I have witnessed firsthand the toll that gambling addiction takes on families in Virginia and across the country. The consequences extend far beyond the individual--addiction fractures families, destabilizes household finances, and contributes to cascading public health challenges. With more than 30 years of professional experience in problem gambling prevention at the national level, I write to urge you to keep skill game machines illegal in Virginia.

When Virginia legalized casinos and sports betting, policymakers implemented meaningful consumer safeguards. The state dedicated [2.5 percent](#) of gambling tax revenue to the Problem Gambling Treatment Fund to support addiction prevention and treatment programs. Licensed operators are required to implement comprehensive, regulator-approved responsible gambling plans with employee training, player protection tools, consumer education, and promotion of problem gambling resources. The Commonwealth also established self-exclusion programs allowing individuals in recovery to voluntarily exclude themselves from gambling venues, with operators legally bound to enforce those exclusions.

Skill games operate in an entirely different environment. Recent events in Virginia further underscore the reality that these devices cannot be adequately regulated to protect Virginians, no matter what safeguards are proposed.

Just in recent months, a former Eastville police officer was sentenced to prison after gambling away over [\\$831,000](#), most of which was spent at skill game machines located in convenience stores on the Eastern Shore. Court records indicate the officer would sit at these machines for hours, continuously feeding his addiction. This case exemplifies a fundamental problem: skill games are placed in everyday environments staffed by retail workers with little to no training or ability to intervene when someone is in crisis. Unlike regulated casinos, these slot-style games are loosely, if at all, monitored, while extracting money from vulnerable Virginians who cannot afford the losses.

Gambling addiction affects the brain's reward system in the same way as substance addiction. High frequency and high speed of play is associated with gambling addiction. Furthermore,

availability and accessibility are primary drivers of problem gambling. The evidence from Virginia's own experience is stark. When skill games were briefly legalized, they ranked among the [top three](#) types of gambling reported by people seeking addiction treatment.

The youngest Virginians face heightened vulnerability to skill game machines. Children most likely encounter these devices more frequently in their daily routines than any other form of gambling, whether it is at a gas station or a popular restaurant, normalizing gambling during their formative years. Early exposure to gambling significantly [increases](#) the risk of developing gambling problems later in life. Adolescent brains are still developing impulse control and risk assessment capabilities, making young people uniquely susceptible to addiction pathways.

The most effective strategy is prevention. Virginia has an opportunity to better protect its citizens by refusing to allow these machines to cause further damage.

Governor Spanberger, you have already committed to making Virginia a place where working people can afford to build their lives. I strongly believe skill games move in the opposite direction and function to increase social costs particularly among people who are financially or emotionally vulnerable as well as those suffering from gambling problems.

The data is clear. [Two-thirds](#) of Virginia voters oppose legalization of skill games. To protect Virginians from the harm that follows, these machines must remain illegal. I urge you and the General Assembly to reject any proposal to legalize skill games.

Thank you for your consideration and dedication to protecting Virginia communities. If you or your staff would like to discuss this matter in more detail, please let me know.

Sincerely,



Keith Whyte

President & CEO of Safer Gambling Strategies LLC

Former Executive Director of the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG)

cc: The Honorable Ghazala Hashmi, Lieutenant Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia
The Honorable Jay Jones, Attorney General, Commonwealth of Virginia
Members of the Virginia General Assembly