

Good afternoon,

Please find a letter (below and attached) on behalf of the Virginia Council on Problem Gambling.

Sincerely,

Virginians Against Neighborhood Slot Machines Team



VIRGINIA COUNCIL on PROBLEM GAMBLING
knowledge | strength | support

January 30, 2026

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

Dear Governor Spanberger:

We write to share our concerns regarding the potential legalization of skill games in the Commonwealth. Although skill games may have slight differences from typical casino slot machines, from a problem gambling perspective, they are functionally the same. Among the characteristics associated with gambling addiction are high speed of play, high frequency of play, and perception of skill.

The mission of the Virginia Council on Problem Gambling is to increase public awareness of problem gambling, ensure the widespread availability of treatment for problem gamblers and their families, and to encourage research and programs for prevention and education.

We'd be remiss not to note that, in recent years, calls to the problem gambling hotline have been steadily increasing. For example, both Helpline calls and intakes increased in 2025 from the previous year. Helpline calls were up **39%**, totaling 21,983 calls. Intakes, which are counted once the caller directly asks for help with problem gambling, increased **50%** from 2024 to 1,508. **|** When skill games were legalized, skill games were one of the top three types of gambling reported by helpline callers. The Commonwealth has authorized many new avenues for gambling within a very short period of time, and we're seeing the impact.

While our organization does not take a position for or against legalized gambling, as advocates for those impacted by problem gambling, we believe the lack of controls in a non-casino environment raises serious concerns about minors accessing these devices. Given the ubiquitous nature of skill machines, children will be exposed in their daily lives at convenience stores, restaurants, and gas stations, where enforcement of age limits is tenuous. This is particularly troubling because research indicates that early exposure and participation in gambling can be a risk factor for developing a gambling problem later in life.

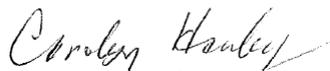
We have long sought to ensure any legalization of gambling is appropriately coupled with efforts to prevent and treat problem gambling. As the General Assembly legalized casinos and sports betting, we advocated for those bills to designate a portion of tax revenues for problem gambling programs and implement responsible gambling measures to protect customers. The legislature took many of our suggestions, including funding, and ensured the measures required operators to implement comprehensive and regulator-approved responsible gambling plans, which include employee training, player tools, consumer education, and the promotion of problem gambling resources. The same cannot be said for the current skill game proposal, which lacks full consideration of these key measures.

Most states with legal, regulated gaming – including Virginia – also have self-exclusion programs to help individuals affected by problem gambling distance themselves from the temptation of gambling in a casino or online. By enrolling in these programs, individuals agree to be barred from engaging in gambling activities, and operators are prohibited from marketing to or permitting them to enter their facilities. Skill machines are often located out of sight, and to the extent that they are overseen by staff, the staff is not trained to recognize signs of gambling problems or required to ensure that self-excluded individuals are not playing these games. These factors undercut the ability of self-exclusion to serve as an effective tool for those in recovery in Virginia.

For these reasons, we urge you to proceed with extreme caution and carefully consider the many significant risks posed by widespread legalization of skill game devices.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Dr. Carolyn Hawley, President
Virginia Council on Problem Gambling



Willard L. Robertson, Executive Director
Virginia Council on Problem Gambling

www.vcpbg.net

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