



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

Addabbo Concerned Over Access to Dangerous Form of Gambling, Sweepstakes Casinos Targeting Minors

JOSEPH P. ADDABBO JR. February 20, 2025

Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr., chair of the NYS Senate Racing, Gaming, and Wagering Committee, is concerned over the increasing number of sweepstakes casinos operating in New York State, which are easily accessible to minors, exacerbating the risks of underage gambling and is taking steps to address the issue.

These casinos, which offer virtual currency and prize-based gaming systems, are seen by some as a loophole allowing vulnerable populations, including minors, to gain access to potentially harmful gambling activities without the safeguards associated with traditional casinos.

“While I support responsible, regulated, and legal gaming options, I also recognize the need to prevent harmful effects of problem gambling,” said Addabbo. “Sweepstakes casinos pose a significant risk to the well-being of young individuals, who are particularly vulnerable to the dangers of gambling addiction. New York must take action to close the sweepstakes casino loophole, to limit access and establish protections for impressionable populations by enacting a much safer, state-regulated, interactive gaming or iGaming option,” Addabbo concluded.

The growing trend of sweepstakes casinos marketed to younger audiences is alarming. Unlike regulated gambling operations, these platforms bypass legal gambling age restrictions, offering games that resemble traditional casino experiences. With easy access through mobile devices and online platforms, these games attract a demographic often unaware of the long-term consequences of gambling addiction.

The rise in online and sweepstakes gambling has made it easier for minors to become involved in games with real monetary stakes. Under the guise of “virtual” prizes and the ability to purchase virtual coins, many users are unknowingly exposed to addictive patterns. This increasing accessibility to gambling by individuals under the legal age has raised serious concerns within both the gambling addiction prevention community and state regulators.

Unlike traditional forms of gambling, sweepstakes casinos are often unregulated, allowing players to engage in high-risk activities with little oversight or enforcement. The lack of effective age verification systems has allowed minors to bypass restrictions, potentially triggering a range of psychological and financial problems. “Imagine being 21 years old with a mere tapping on a screen. That’s all it takes to log into a sweepstakes casino site and gamble. The lack of safeguards against minors gambling on such virtual games is extremely troublesome,” Addabbo noted.

According to a January 2024 *Parents* magazine online article, kids and teens are more than twice as likely to develop a gambling disorder than adults. In the article, *Know the Odds*, an organization seeking to raise awareness for problem gambling and prevent addiction, reports that children introduced to gambling by age 12 are four times more likely to develop a problem.

“The legal age for gambling in the United States is 18 or 21, depending on the state, but digital platforms have made gambling more accessible allowing kids to see targeting ads even if

they aren't of legal gambling age," Addabbo added. "Even though the sites may have a legal age, underage kids circumvent those with ease. Unfortunately, gambling for minors might be even more devastating than alcohol and drug addiction because it's easy to hide since you can't easily detect the smell or impairing effects of online slot play," explained Addabbo.

Addabbo legislation (*S.2614*) to allow interactive gaming (iGaming), would provide state-regulated online casino play to age-appropriate individuals, while eliminating these unregulated sweepstakes gambling platforms. In addition, the Office of Addiction Supports and Services provides funding to the NYS Council on Problem Gambling to promote awareness of the dangers associated with sweepstakes casinos and to expand resources for addiction prevention, offering support services for individual affected by problem gambling.

The Senator is also considering separate legislation to address the sweepstakes casino issue and intends to work with the New York State Gaming Commission and other agencies to tackle the matter administratively.

The New York State Council on Problem Gambling is a not-for-profit independent corporation dedicated to increasing public awareness about problem and disordered gambling and advocating for support services and treatment for persons adversely affected by problem gambling. NYCPG is. For information on resources available for problem gambling, visit www.nyproblemgamblinghelp.org or for 24/7 support, call the NYS OASAS HOPEline at 1-877-846-7369 or text 467369.