



SAMPLE LETTER

September 25, 2014

Mr. Michael Norton, Editor
State House News Service
Press Room, State House,
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Michael,

On behalf of Stop Predatory Gambling, and in light of the ongoing conflict in Massachusetts over casinos as a public policy, I am writing with a very important invitation to participate in our “**A Penny Is All It Takes**” campaign because you are a member of that thin layer in our society often referred to as “opinion leaders.”

SPG, a 501c3 non-profit organization based in Washington, DC with an office in Massachusetts, is a national transpartisan network of citizens and groups dedicated to a fundamental national reform: ending the unfairness and inequality created by government-sponsored gambling.

Predatory gambling is when government uses gambling to cheat and exploit citizens. For-profit gambling is illegal unless the government gives its full support, and in nearly every instance operates *in partnership* with gambling interests whether in the form of state lotteries, commercial casinos or tribal casinos. This partnership has presented “problem gambling” to opinion leaders and the public as the measure of predatory gambling’s harms (“it’s just a few citizens who will be hurt”), willfully ignoring the broader patterns of institutional inequality and exploitation it creates, and the expendability of citizens already in marginalized populations.

For almost eight years, the public policy of casinos has dominated the headlines in Massachusetts. It became an issue not because of a movement by concerned citizens demanding casinos in the state. State officials created this policy to extract as much money as possible from citizens to fund government and it was fueled by one of the most powerful special interests in the world that has spent tens of millions of dollars on lobbying, paid and earned media, highly-sophisticated public affairs campaigns and political contributions.

Over that time, at least a million words have been written and spoken about casinos by opinion leaders and serious, professional journalists in the state. Yet remarkably, **only one news story published on a Saturday has focused on the design and technology of electronic slot machines, the actual “commodity” that is the sun and the moon of the casino business.**¹

“A Penny is All It Takes”

Regardless of the enormous money spent by gambling interests and the willful efforts by some public officials to push this policy through and suppress citizen opposition, I don't cast blame on opinion leaders for the nonexistent spotlight on slot machines thus far. Rather, it is evident that our work, especially my own, has not been effective enough.

To change that, **we ask you to participate in our “A Penny is All It Takes” campaign.** In a marked contrast to the tens of millions of dollars spent by casinos on TV ads and mailings that don't mention the word casino or even show a photo of a slot machine, **a penny is all it takes to decide if casinos and slot machines are in the best interest of you, your family and everyone in the state.**

We respectfully ask you to please take the penny attached to this letter and drive to Foxwoods, Mohegan Sun, Twin River or Penn National's Hollywood Casino in Bangor, Maine and use a penny slot machine. (Penny slot machines predominate on the casino floors because middle-to-low income citizens are the target market for regional casinos.²) **Then we ask when you return to Massachusetts, to please widely share what you learned with your community and, if a journalist, your readers and viewers.**

As part of your trip, there are three specific questions we ask you to answer for yourself and ultimately, share that judgment with other people:

- 1) Are slot machines rigged? Do they cheat ordinary citizens?
- 2) Are slot machines financially and socially harmful if used by citizens in the way their designers intend?
- 3) Will slots create more unfairness and inequality in the state or less?

A Little Background on Slots Before You Make Your Trip

Today, the electronic gambling machine has become government's preferred method of extracting money from citizens through gambling. Slots make up to 80% of gambling profits.

These gambling machines are built mathematically so users are certain to lose their money the longer they play. At the same time, the machines are literally designed so citizens cannot stop using them, exploiting aspects of human psychology and inducing irrational and irresponsible behavior. Every feature of a slot machine - its mathematical structure, visual graphics, sound dynamics, seating and screen ergonomics - is designed to increase a player's "time on device" - which means how long a person plays.³ Gambling operators found that their profits were not about the size of the gamblers' stakes but rather the volume of their play. "If you provide them with the right time-on-device, they will stay and play," one slot designer said to MIT Professor Dr. Natasha Schull in her recent book on slot machine technology titled *Addiction By Design*. "If

you take it too quickly and they lose, they're going to leave.”⁴ In the actual language of the casino business, the goal is to get every user “to play to extinction” — until all their money is gone, Dr. Schull quotes a slot marketing expert. ⁵ “I want to keep you there as long as humanly possible,” another slot operator told her. “That’s the whole trick, that’s what makes you lose.”⁶

The slot machine is designed to be so effective at extracting money from people, wrote Dr. Schull, that it is “a product that, for all intents and purposes, *approaches every player as a potential addict* - in other words, someone who won't stop playing until his or her means are depleted.”

The effectiveness of slot design is undeniable: over the last decade *there are 11 different independent studies* – studies not funded by gambling interests - that show 40%-60% of slot machine profits are taken from citizens who can't stop using them. Gambling addicts.⁷

“Slots are for losers”

A key underlying reason why there has been no examination of slot machines is because most people, especially opinion leaders, rarely use a slot machine, if at all. It’s especially true for the slot machine makers, casino operators, and the state officials they partner with, one of the most telling and revealing indictments of this public policy. In his cover story on slot machines for *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, *Times* reporter Gary Rivlin toured the headquarters of America’s biggest maker of electronic slot machines, International Gaming Technology (IGT). **“When I asked one I.G.T. artist if he ever plays, he acted as if I had insulted him,” Rivlin wrote. “Slots are for losers,’ he spat, and then, coming to his senses, begged me to consider that an off-the-record comment.”**⁸

Despite reaping billions of dollars from the “losers” in America, nearly every major casino operator, including most involved in Massachusetts like Steve Wynn⁹, Jim Murren¹⁰, CEO of MGM, and KT Lim¹¹, Chairman of Genting, the casino operator backing the Mashpee Wampanoag project, *do not gamble themselves*.¹²

But slot makers and casino operators are not the only ones who don’t gamble. **Nearly all of the Massachusetts political officials who sponsored casinos *don’t gamble either*:**

- Governor Deval Patrick, who made legalizing casinos a top priority of his administration, has virtually no personal experience gambling inside casinos. According to *State House News Service*, Patrick said he “used to take his mother to gamble at Foxwoods and recalled spending time at a Las Vegas casino when he worked at Coca-Cola.”¹³
- Massachusetts House Speaker Robert DeLeo, a leading proponent of legalizing casinos in the state, conceded in a television interview in 2011, “I’ve only been in a casino twice in my life and one of those times was for a boxing match.”¹⁴

- State Senator Stan Rosenberg, a key supporter of legalizing casinos in Massachusetts and described by some in the media as the “State House casino expert,” answered “Nope” when asked by *The Boston Globe* if he ever gambled.¹⁵
- State Representative Joe Wagner, chairman of the House legislative committee that spearheaded the push to legalize casinos in the state, confessed to *The Boston Globe* that “his gambling experience is limited to the ‘occasional game of Keno.’”¹⁶
- Stephen Crosby, Chairman of the Massachusetts Gambling Commission and the man tasked with bringing casinos to the Bay State, told *The Boston Business Journal* in 2012 he has never set foot in a casino.¹⁷
- Not surprisingly, but no less remarkably, the other four members of the Massachusetts Gambling Commission each acknowledged to *The Boston Globe* in 2012 of having little experience at casino gambling. “None of us is a very active gambler,” Chairman Crosby said.¹⁸

The Attached Penny is Not Just Any Penny: The Scott Stevens Story

The penny in this letter is given to you in memory of Scott Stevens, **a man who was an opinion leader just like you.** A citizen of Steubenville, Ohio, Scott was a success by nearly every measure we use in America. Through hard work and sacrifice, Scott became a very successful business executive, earning an upper-middle class income. He was happily married with three daughters and actively served his community in a variety of different volunteer leadership roles. But the lives of Scott Stevens and his family changed forever when they intersected with a government program unlike any other. Scott was one of the “losers” who used a slot machine. He became someone who used the slot machine the way its maker and promoter intended: he could not stop using it. He lost his job because he took company money and poured it into slot machines sponsored by the government. He maxed out his credit cards to tens of thousands of dollars. He emptied his daughters’ college savings accounts and his 401k retirement funds. He owed huge debts to the IRS for not paying taxes on what government labeled his “winnings,” despite losing far greater money than he won.

On August 13, 2012, even though he had already given almost everything he had to this public policy, Scott Stevens made one last sacrifice. He drove to a children’s soccer park in his town that he raised money to build. He sat down on a park bench. He called 911 on his cell phone and told them what he was planning to do. When the police and ambulance arrived at the park he said, “You’re not here to stop me, you’re here to take me home” and then shot himself in front of them. In the days afterward, a letter arrived in the mail addressed to his wife Stacy. Scott mailed it before taking his own life. It said, in part:

“I know you don’t believe it but I love you so much! I have hurt you so much. Our family only has a chance if I’m not around to bring us down any further. You’re such an unbelievable wife and mother. I know you will hold the family together...”

While millions of men and women like Scott Stevens and their families have sacrificed and hurt so much to provide needed revenues to American government, no one has ever thanked them for their “service.” There are no parades with fluttering American flags in the breeze. No yellow ribbons. Our country simply renders them failures.

Thanks for seriously considering our invitation to use a slot machine at a casino over the next week. If you are interested in learning more about the machines before your trip, you can visit our website or contact me directly at our Massachusetts office (978) 683-4339.

Scott Stevens’s life is worth at least a penny.

Sincerely,



Les Bernal, National Director
Stop Predatory Gambling
(and a resident of Lawrence, Massachusetts)

P.S. All casinos within a day’s drive are open 24 hours so if you want to really get a feel for what is literally a government program to help fund government itself, arrive about 4am on a weekday. You will be overwhelmed by the fun. Just like they market it.

¹ Carey Goldberg, “Glitzy video slots seen as particular addiction risk,” *The Boston Globe*, March 7, 2009

² Hoa Nguyen, *Penny slots are popular, flexible and profitable, so they’re gaining more space on casino floors*, THE PRESS OF ATLANTIC CITY, December 14, 2014, http://m.pressofatlanticcity.com/news/breaking/penny-slots-are-popular-flexible-and-profitable-so-they-re/article_a161f006-82a4-11e2-9477-001a4bcf887a.html?mode=jqm

³ Natasha Dow Schull, PhD, *Beware: Machine Zone Ahead*, Washington Post, July 6, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/04/AR2008070402134.html>

⁴ NATASHA DOW SCHULL, PHD, ADDICTION BY DESIGN, MACHINE GAMBLING IN LAS VEGAS, (2012), available at <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/9156.html> Pg. 126.

⁵ Natasha Dow Schull, PhD, *Beware: Machine Zone Ahead*, Washington Post, July 6, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/04/AR2008070402134.html>

⁶ NATASHA DOW SCHULL, PHD, ADDICTION BY DESIGN, MACHINE GAMBLING IN LAS VEGAS, (2012), available at <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/9156.html> Pg 126.

⁷ Institute for American Values, Council on Casinos, *Why Casinos Matter, Thirty-One Evidence-Based Propositions from the Health and Social Sciences*, September 2013, Pg. 29, <http://americanvalues.org/catalog/pdfs/why-casinos-matter.pdf>

⁸ **[The Tug of the Newfangled Slot Machines](#)** by Gary Rivlin, *The NY Times Magazine*, May 9, 2004

⁹ “Casino Mogul Steve Wynn’s Midas Touch,” *60 Minutes*, April 12, 2009, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/casino-mogul-steve-wynns-midas-touch/>

¹⁰ Andrew Ross Sorkin, *Is There Life After Blackjack? Ask MGM*, N.Y. Times, December 26, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/26/business/26vegas.html?_r=0

¹¹ *The Savvy Gambler*, THE BUSINESS TIMES, SINGAPORE, December 2, 2006, <http://stoppredatorygambling.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/KT-Lim-The-savvy-gambler.pdf>

¹² Stop Predatory Gambling Foundation, *The Smartest Guys NOT in the Room*, <http://stoppredatorygambling.org/blog/category/research-center/the-smartest-guys-not-in-the-room/>

¹³ “Patrick Signs Casino Law,” *State House News Service*, November 22, 2011.

¹⁴ *Interview with Massachusetts Speaker of the House Robert DeLeo*, WCVB TV Channel 5, September 25, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55jN3APEfnY&list=PL95F87248339E73A3&index=12&feature=plpp_video

¹⁵ Matt Viser, *Inside Man: An Interview With Stan Rosenberg, the State House’s Casino Expert*, BOSTON GLOBE, January 10, 2010, http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2010/01/10/inside_man/

¹⁶ Mark Arsenault et al, *House Approves Casino Bill*, BOSTON GLOBE, September 15, 2011, <http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2011/09/15/house-casino-bill/4cv0eZfj89em7JpHVfBLfI/story.html>

¹⁷ Thomas Grillo, *Mass. casino commissioner has never set foot in a casino*, BOSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL, March 19, 2012, http://www.bizjournals.com/boston/real_estate/2012/03/gaming-commissioner-no-gambler.html?page=all

¹⁸ Mark Arsenault, *Gambling commission lacks casino experience*, BOSTON GLOBE, March 21, 2012, <http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2012/03/20/gambling-commission-light-casino-industry-experience/ctugog3wdTWoQODm4bbHiP/story.html>