

Presentation to the
Standing Senate Committee on Transportation and Communication
On Bill S-269, An Act respecting a national framework on advertising for sports betting
Senate of Canada
June 5, 2024

By Bruce Kidd, Campaign to Ban Ads for Gambling

I speak on behalf of the Campaign to Ban Ads for Gambling, a group of sports-loving Canadians deeply concerned about the harm created by ads for sports betting, especially among children and youth. We are Olympians, sports leaders, parents of athletes, researchers and teachers.

We call upon the Government of Canada to ban all ads for gambling in the same way and for the same health reasons that Canada already bans ads for tobacco and cannabis. We call upon Canada to adopt a public health approach to the problems of sports betting, rather than the 'blame the victim', 'responsible gambling' approach currently taken by provinces and the gambling industry.

Our Campaign enjoys broad support across Canada, from school boards and universities, health bodies, religious organizations, to MPs from all five political parties, and the public.

A [survey](#) conducted by [Maru Public Opinion](#) in February found that 75% of Canadians said that there's a need to protect children and youth from sports betting commercials. 66 per cent said that those commercials should not be allowed during live sports, and 59 per cent believe a nationwide ban on the ads should be implemented immediately. That's an overwhelming majority on all questions.

We fully support the passage of Bill S-269 and commend Senators Deacon and Cotter for introducing it.

When Parliament amended the Criminal Code in 2021 to approve sports betting, there was no debate about the consequences of advertising, despite the well-documented research about the harmful impacts and the public policy responses from other countries. This was a huge failure of public policy-making. Since legalization, there has been a virtual tsunami of ads for gambling—during televised sports, on social media, in sports facilities, and even cinemas. CBC Marketplace recently reported that 21% of the time of sports broadcasts is now devoted to gambling ads and commentators' discussion of betting possibilities.

While the regulations prohibit ads directed at children, youth, and vulnerable people, many ads target those populations explicitly. Research shows that ads significantly increase the amount of gambling and exacerbate addiction and problem gambling. Statistics Canada estimates that 1.6% of adult gamblers in Canada, or 304,400 persons, are at moderate to high risk of gambling disorders, including mental health issues. These can lead to bankruptcy, loss of homes, family break-up, even suicide.

Problem gambling was classified as a non-substance-related addictive disorder by the American Psychiatric Association in 2013. The *Canadian Safety Council* considers gambling addiction a community safety and crime prevention issue.

Although we do not yet know how many Canadian children and youth have been groomed into gambling, we hear from parents, grandparents, teachers and coaches that those numbers are substantial. The Canadian Mental Health Association (Saskatchewan) has redirected its educational programs about the harms of sports betting from Grade 9 to Grade 1.

In the US, the National Council on Problem Gambling reports that between 60 and 80 percent of high school students gambled for money last year, and 4 to 6 percent are considered addicted.

Another serious concern is the growing harassment of athletes whose performances do not meet the expectations of those who bet on them. This is a safe sport issue.

Very little of the considerable revenues enjoyed by the betting industry—some \$588 million in Ontario alone last year, on total betting of \$9.7 billion—are put into mental health services, education and research.

The federal government must assume responsibility for this situation. The most effective strategy of public health harm reduction is to ban the ads.

Bill S-269 starts the necessary process to control gambling ads, which is why we support it and ask that you approve and forward it to the House of Commons.