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Family of New York Man Raise Awareness about Problem Gambling: *Call for More Treatment Support and Greater Understanding of Gambling Addiction*

(Long Island, NY) -- As Suffolk County, NY prepares to open a 1000-slot machine parlor in the coming months, local resident Kim Meyer and her five children are struggling to survive the devastating toll gambling addiction has taken on their lives.

Kim lives in a small town in Suffolk County, in the home where she and her high school sweetheart Scott built a full and happy life together over the last 27 years. They co-funded a business, Scott coached the kids' sports teams, and both were involved in their community, schools and church.

As Kim tells it, Scott began gambling many years ago for fun, as the vast majority of people do without any negative consequences. For Scott, the fun quickly escalated to a problem. He exhibited symptoms of pathological gambling – symptoms that often go unnoticed by family and friends. He hid his gambling as losses mounted. His overwhelming urge to gamble is similar to the psychological and physical cravings of other addicts. He needed to bet more and more money to numb the pain. Finally he hit bottom, opened up to his business partners and family and sought treatment. With intensive therapy he was able to stop gambling, reconnect with family and begin paying restitution.

Unfortunately despite two years of solid recovery he was eventually arrested and is now serving a 4½ - 13-year prison sentence for using clients' funds to chase more than \$500,000 in gambling losses. But unlike other non-violent, first time offenders Scott was not able to participate in highly successful jail diversion programs, enroll in prison-based rehabilitation and treatment programs that offer reduced sentences for successful graduates, or even start a Gamblers Anonymous meeting, all because his addiction is treated differently.

The American Psychiatric Association classifies gambling disorders in the Addictive Disorders category, "reflecting evidence that gambling behaviors activate reward systems similar to those activated by drugs of abuse and produce some behavioral symptoms that appear comparable to those produced by the substance use disorders." But misunderstanding and stigma persists.

"Unfortunately, gambling is rarely viewed as a disease in society," says Kim. "Instead it is seen as a moral issue and a choice. The criminal justice system is ill informed, and prosecutors refused to consider gambling addiction as the explanation for how a smart, loving, hard-working man could sabotage his life and that of his family."

Kim has decided to go public with their private nightmare, to help raise awareness about gambling addiction and reduce the stigma that persists – lessons she and her family learned through painful personal experience.

[Kim's daughters created this video](#) to raise awareness and let their dad know how much they love and support him.

“What we would like to see is for all casinos, state lotteries, tracks and charitable gambling operators to use a very small amount of their profits to help raise awareness and to protect others by instituting some simple safeguards, such as:

- Including gambling addiction prevention into health classes in schools. Neither Kim & Scott nor their kids ever received any information or presentations in school;
- Ensuring that high quality treatment for problem gamblers and their family members is available and affordable. Services for family members are critical;
- Working with regulators, industry leaders and advocacy groups to strengthen current responsible gaming programs and make them a requirement for receiving and renewing a gambling license;
- Using reward card tracking systems not just to make offers to entice gamblers to continue gambling but to identify potential warning signs of gambling addiction;
- Commissioning ongoing annual surveys to determine the rate of gambling problems and any changes as gambling continues to expand;
- Establishing gambling courts (modeled on the extremely successful Amherst, NY program) and expand in-prison opportunities and probation/parole programs to reduce criminal justice costs of gambling addiction before, during and after incarceration in order to improve recovery and aid rehabilitation.

In spite of extensive evidence of his medical problems and his addiction; being in treatment and rehabilitation for two years; having a new job with a boss willing to testify on his behalf; another judge who was an expert on gambling addiction willing to testify for him; and his steady paying off of bills and beginning to make restitution to his victims; the judge believed that Scott “should have simply stopped when he realized his gambling was a problem” and found him guilty.

Kim continues to work with attorneys to get Scott released as soon as possible so he can continue his treatment and recovery, and continue paying back his debts.

“Our family made the decision to share our story and to work side by side with the [National Council on Problem Gambling](#), as well as the [New York](#) and [Connecticut](#) state councils in an effort to change things for the better.

"I have faith that together we can encourage everyone to increase their commitment to identify and help problem gamblers and their families, and spare others from this experience. It's a promise I've made to my children – that something good can come from this."

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