Gambling and the Criminal Justice System Fact Sheet

The State of Connecticut spends over $50,000 per year to incarcerate each inmate, and gambling is common in criminal justice populations.
- Over one-third of inmates gamble while incarcerated.\(^2\)
- An estimated 33\% of inmates have gambling problems,\(^2,4\) with rates as high as 49\% in older adult inmates.\(^5\)
- Over half of inmates with gambling disorder report that their incarceration resulted directly from gambling-related crimes.\(^2,3\)

Up to half of persons with severe gambling disorder commit illegal acts to support their gambling.\(^5,6\)
- The most common illegal acts include writing bad checks and stealing or “borrowing” money or goods from friends or relatives, often with the intent of returning it.\(^7\)
- Embezzlement is rare, but gambling-related fraud and embezzlement cases are growing especially in regions close to casinos.\(^8\)
- Violent non-income generating crimes are also related to gambling disorder, and nearly two-thirds of persons with gambling disorder are perpetrators or victims of violence.\(^9\)

Gambling and substance use disorders commonly occur together.
- Substance use disorders increase the likelihood of a gambling disorder by more than 4-fold.\(^10\) Over 20\% of persons with substance use disorders have gambling problems.\(^11\)
- Gambling and substance use significantly increase suicidality, and up to one-third of persons with gambling disorder attempt suicide.\(^12\)

**Despite the prevalence of gambling and related problems, almost no one in the criminal justice system receives treatment for gambling.**

Treatment for gambling can be very effective.
- Over 75\% of persons treated for gambling substantially reduce their gambling.\(^13,15\)
- Psychiatric distress and symptoms decrease markedly with gambling treatment.\(^13,15\)
- Gambling treatment clients who commit illegal acts to support their gambling respond as well to treatment as gamblers who do not commit illegal acts.\(^7\)

**Suggested action steps:**

1. Screen criminal justice system clients for gambling problems using established and confidential methods.\(^3,5\)
2. Provide appropriate interventions to persons identified with gambling problems. Assessment and brief interventions can markedly reduce gambling, even in problem gamblers not specifically seeking gambling treatment.\(^6\)