

Gambling foes urge governor to suspend lottery sales 30 days

April 27, 2020

National and statewide anti-gambling organizations have urged Texas Gov. Greg Abbott to suspend the sale of lottery tickets for 30 days in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic turmoil.

The Texas Lottery on April 21 reported a \$112 million surge in the sale of instant scratch-off tickets over the previous week—just when COVID-19 stimulus checks began arriving from the federal government, according to the [Houston Chronicle](#). It represented a 16 percent spike in sales over the same week last year.

“Clearly, money that was intended for groceries, housing and other necessities was misspent on lottery tickets in too many cases,” said Rodger Weems, chairman of Texans Against Gambling.

His organization is calling on Abbott to issue an executive order suspending the sale of lottery tickets as a temporary emergency measure.

The governor’s office had not replied to a request for an on-the-record response when this article was posted.

Public health risk

Texans Against Gambling asserts the continued sales of lottery tickets not only exploits desperate people during a period of financial vulnerability and feeds addictive behavior, but also presents a continuing public health risk.

Since Texas does not permit online sale of lottery tickets, customers  must enter a convenience store or other outlet to purchase a ticket,

either at the checkout counter or from a vending machine, Weems noted.

If a player wins \$600 or less, he or she cashes the ticket at the point of sale. If winnings exceed \$600, the customer goes to a Texas Lottery office to cash the ticket. So, any winning ticket changes hands several times, he observed.

At a time when other activities are curtailed and social distancing is required, the sale of lottery tickets presents “an unnecessary risk of infection and disease,” Weems asserted.

‘Preying on financial desperation’

The national Stop Predatory Gambling organization went further, urging the governors of all 50 states to shut down the sale of lottery tickets for 30 days.

“State lotteries are openly preying upon the financial desperation of millions of Americans,” said Les Bernal, national director of Stop Predatory Gambling.

Bernal cited studies indicating many people who gamble on the lottery act out of desperation to try to improve their financial condition when they are most vulnerable.

“Luring citizens to lose their money on lottery gambling games during this time defeats the intended purpose of the stimulus,” Bernal said. “Government sending stimulus and unemployment checks to families in need while states continue to operate lotteries will result in greater financial loss for our citizens, rather than fulfilling the intent of providing for essential needs and encouraging consumer spending to benefit the economy and create jobs.”