

To the Washington State Gambling Commission:

I understand the Washington State Gambling Commission is investigating whether or not online games and apps like Big Fish Casino should be considered illegal gambling. I would like to offer my personal experience with Big Fish Casino for your consideration.

My name is Suzie Kelly. I'm 60 years old, and I live in Plano, Texas. I'm married and have 2 adult sons, and one granddaughter who is 5.

In May of 2014, after seeing TV commercials for Big Fish Casino—"play for fun, play for free"—I downloaded the "free" app on my iPhone. At first, my game play was nothing more than a few minutes a day. I would log on, collect a small daily bonus, spin the slots a few times, then put my phone down.

Within days of starting, I started spending money to buy chips. The prices for chip packages are quite expensive. However, the higher your VIP tier, the more chips you would receive in a package. Within a month of downloading the app I was spending hundreds, then thousands of dollars on chip packages. Over the next four years, I spent more than \$300,000 gambling on Big Fish Casino.

After spending hundreds of thousands of dollars, I surpassed the supposedly-top-tier VIP 15 rank to the "mystery" VIP 16 rank, achieving Big Fish Casino's "you are royalty to us" status. Big Fish Casino assigned me a personal VIP host, Byron Scott. Byron personally called me; sent me his direct email address; responded to all of my emails (in the beginning) within minutes; took the time to get to know me personally; knew more about me than most of my friends did; even had flowers sent to my home when my mother passed away in 2016. He sent me free chips regularly, although sometimes he and other VIP hosts told me that I hadn't spent enough money recently for them to be allowed to send me any. All in all, I have hundreds of emails and messages from Byron.

I had literally lost sense of reality. My reality became the app. My reality became withdrawing funds from my husband's 401(k), and taking two home equity loans on our residence to pay off the credit card charges for the chip purchases. More importantly, I almost lost my husband due to this addiction. I finally told him about everything last month, and I am unbelievably lucky that my addiction to Big Fish Casino didn't cost me my marriage. But financially, we've lost everything and don't know how we're ever going to recover.

You might ask yourself, how could anyone get to this point? The answer is that Big Fish Casino and its competitors (like Double Down and Huuuge, which I've also played) are digital casinos, and just like regular casinos, are designed to be as addictive as possible. Just like regular slot machines, the games have bright colors and flashing lights and exciting noises. But its more than that. With Big Fish Casino, you don't ever have to get in your car and drive, you can just pick up your phone and start playing anytime and anywhere—which for me was all of the time and everywhere.

There is one major difference between Big Fish Casino and regular casinos. While—just like a regular casino—you can lose hundreds or even thousands of dollars’ worth of chips per spin, you can never actually win real money. As it turns out (and as I learned the hard way), you don’t need the possibility of winning real money to get hooked playing Big Fish Casino.

The social aspect of Big Fish Casino makes it even more addictive. Everyone who spends a lot of money on Big Fish belongs to a “club,” which helps you get extra chips. But when you don’t play for a little while, the other members in your club message you to try to get you back into the game (so they can get extra chips). And everyone can always see your chip count, how much you’ve won for the day, your status, whether you’ve won any trophies for the club lately, and things like that.

When I would ask Big Fish Casino to ban my account, or ban my credit card, or say that I thought I needed to take a break from playing because of how much money I was spending, Byron would tell me how much he and the other VIP hosts would miss me, and that they would be sad to see me go.

My experience is not unique. Over the last 4 years, I’ve gotten to know a lot of other “VIP” players on Big Fish Casino – many of them would talk about how they were retired, widowed, or on a fixed income. People would talk about how they couldn’t pay their bills but they kept buying chips anyway. I also know several other VIPs who, like me, kept their addiction a secret and were afraid their spouses would find out how much money they had lost playing Big Fish Casino.

There is nothing “free” about Big Fish Casino. To prevent even more people from falling into this same trap, I ask you to please regulate Big Fish Casino (and other games like it) as online gambling.

Sincerely,

Suzie Kelly