



OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF ILLINOIS

Lisa Madigan
ATTORNEY GENERAL

December 23, 2015

FILE NO. 15-006

SPORTS AND GAMING:
Daily Fantasy Sports
Contests as Gambling

The Honorable Elgie R. Sims, Jr.
Chairperson, Judiciary - Criminal Committee
State Representative, 34th District
8658 South Cottage Grove, Suite 404B
Chicago, Illinois 60619

The Honorable Scott R. Drury
Vice-Chairperson, Judiciary - Criminal Committee
State Representative, 58th District
425 Sheridan Road
Highwood, Illinois 60040

Dear Representative Sims and Representative Drury:

You have inquired whether daily fantasy sports contests offered by FanDuel and DraftKings (collectively Contest Organizers) constitute "gambling" under Illinois law. For the reasons stated below, it is my opinion that the contests in question constitute illegal gambling under subsection 28-1(a) of the Criminal Code of 2012 (the Criminal Code) (720 ILCS 5/28-1(a))

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(West 2014)), and the exemption set forth in subsection 28-1(b)(2) of the Criminal Code (720 ILCS 5/28-1(b)(2) (West 2014)) does not apply.

BACKGROUND

The Contest Organizers are currently two of the most prominent companies offering online daily fantasy sports contests. The term "fantasy sports contests" commonly refers to contests involving virtual teams in which participants choose current athletes in a given professional or college sport to create a fantasy sports team and then compete against other fantasy sports participants, with the winner or winners determined based on how those athletes individually perform in their actual professional or college sports game. *See generally Langone v. Kaiser*, No. 12-C-2073, 2013 WL 5567587 (N.D. Ill. October 9, 2013).

Unlike traditional fantasy sports contests, which operate on a season-long timetable, daily fantasy sports contests are conducted over short-term periods, such as a week or single day of competition. Participants who have created accounts with the Contest Organizers pay an entry fee to participate in one or more of a Contest Organizer's fantasy sports contests¹ and select a team of athletes in a certain sport under an imaginary "salary cap," a maximum budget to

¹The Contest Organizers offer a number of different contest formats including leagues, tournaments, head-to-heads, and multipliers. Leagues have a set number of entries allowed, while tournaments do not have a cap on the number of entries. Most tournaments have guaranteed prize pools, where a prize is guaranteed no matter the total number of entrants. In head-to-head contests, two participants compete against each other directly. In multiplier contests, those in a certain top percentage of the total number of participants will win the same amount. FanDuel Website, *available at* <https://www.fanduel.com/how-it-works>; DraftKings Website, *available at* <https://www.draftkings.com/help/faq>.

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spend on athletes for the creation of a fantasy sports team.² The prizes are known in advance of the playing of the actual games, and the prize values do not change based on the number of entries in a particular contest. Participants earn fantasy points based on the statistical performance of the athletes in the actual games. Depending on the athletes' overall performance, participants may win a share of the predetermined prize. Entry fees help fund prizes, with a portion of the fees also going to the appropriate Contest Organizer. Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief at 5-6, *FanDuel, Inc. v. Schneiderman*, No. 161691/2015 (N.Y. Sup. Ct., New York County); Verified Petition at 7-8, *DraftKings, Inc. v. Schneiderman*, No. 102014/2015 (N.Y. Sup. Ct., New York County).

ANALYSIS

The Contest Organizers have suggested that their daily fantasy sports contests are authorized under Federal law. The Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (PASPA) (28 U.S.C. §3701 *et seq.* (2012)), which was enacted in 1992, makes it unlawful for "a person to sponsor, operate, advertise, or promote * * * a lottery, sweepstakes, or other betting, gambling, or wagering scheme based * * * on one or more competitive games in which amateur or professional athletes participate[.]" 28 U.S.C. §3702 (2012). However, the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act of 2006 (UIGEA) (31 U.S.C. §5361 *et seq.* (2012)) was enacted after

²See FanDuel Website, available at <https://www.fanduel.com/how-it-works>; DraftKings Website, available at <https://draftkings.com/help/how-to-play>. Both FanDuel and DraftKings offer free "contests." However, this opinion addresses only those contests in which participants pay an entry fee.

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PASPA's passage and prohibits any person engaged in the business of "betting" from knowingly accepting credit, electronic fund transfers, checks, or any other payment involving a financial institution to settle unlawful internet gambling debts. 31 U.S.C. §5363 (2012). The UIGEA excludes from the definition of "bet or wager" the participation in any fantasy sports game where: (1) all prize amounts are made known before the contest begins; (2) all winning outcomes are based on the relative skill and knowledge of the participants; and (3) no winning outcome is based on the scores or performance of a single, real world event or the performance of any real world team. 31 U.S.C. §5362(1)(E)(ix) (2012). The UIGEA specifically provides, however, that "[n]o provision of this subchapter shall be construed as * * * limiting * * * State law * * * or regulating gambling within the United States." 31 U.S.C. §5361(b) (2012). The UIGEA thus leaves to each state the authority to determine whether daily fantasy sports contests which fall under the UIGEA's requirements constitute illegal gambling.

In that regard, the online Terms of Use for FanDuel provide that individuals who are physically located in Arizona, Iowa, Louisiana, Montana, Nevada, New York, or Washington are not eligible to participate in contests. FanDuel Website, *available at* <https://www.fanduel.com/terms>. Similarly, the online Terms of Use for DraftKings provide that legal residents physically located in the foregoing states, with the exception of New York, are ineligible to participate in contests. DraftKings Website, *available at* <https://www.draftkings.com/help/terms>. It appears that the excluded states have gambling statutes that either expressly prohibit fantasy

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sports gambling (Mont. Code Ann. §23-5-802 (2015), *available at* <http://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/23/5/23-5-802.htm>) or internet gambling (La. Rev. Stat. §14:90.3 (2015), *available at* <http://www.legis.la.gov/legis/LawSearch.aspx>; Wash. Rev. Code §9.46.240 (2015), *available at* <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=9.46.240>) or have been construed by State enforcement authorities to prohibit fantasy sports contests (*see* Ariz. Att'y Gen. Op. No. I98-002, issued January 21, 1998 (concluding that fantasy football constitutes gambling under Arizona law); Memorandum from J. Brin Gibson, Bureau Chief of Gaming and Government Affairs and Ketan D. Bhirud, Head of Complex Litigation, Office of the Nevada Attorney General, to A.G. Burnett, Chairman, Nevada Gaming Control Board, Terry Johnson, Member, Nevada Gaming Control Board, and Shawn Reid, Member, Nevada Gaming Control Board (October 16, 2015) (concluding that daily fantasy sports constitute sports pools and gambling games under Nevada law and therefore cannot be offered in Nevada without first obtaining a gaming license)).³ *See also* 86th Iowa Gen. Assem., Senate File 166, 2015 Sess. (pending legislation proposing to add "Fantasy or Simulation Sports Contests" to the list of lawful *bona fide* contests).

³Additionally, on November 10, 2015, the New York Attorney General's Office issued cease and desist letters to FanDuel and DraftKings, asserting that their operations constitute illegal gambling under New York law. *See* Letter from Kathleen McGee, Chief, Internet Bureau, Office of the New York Attorney General, to Jason Robins, Chief Executive Officer, DraftKings, Inc. (November 10, 2015); Letter from Kathleen McGee, Chief, Internet Bureau, Office of the New York Attorney General, to Nigel Eccles, Chief Executive Officer, FanDuel Inc. (November 10, 2015). That matter is currently in litigation. *See* note 10.

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In Illinois, the legality of daily fantasy sports is a matter of first impression.⁴ The Criminal Code prohibits the playing of both "games of chance or skill for money[.]" Specifically, subsection 28-1(a) of the Criminal Code (720 ILCS 5/28-1(a) (West 2014)) defines the offense of gambling and provides, in pertinent part:

⁴There is one decision from a Federal district court in Illinois addressing daily fantasy sports contests. In *Langone v. Kaiser*, the plaintiff brought a claim under section 28-8 of the Illinois Loss Recovery Act (720 ILCS 5/28-8 (West 2012)) seeking, in part, to recover money from FanDuel and from an Illinois resident that a third party allegedly lost to in a daily fantasy sports contest hosted by FanDuel. The court determined that "[t]he relevant question for the purposes of the Loss Recovery Act is not whether FanDuel's activity is illegal; the question is whether FanDuel is 'the winner' with respect to any particular 'loser.'" *Langone*, 2013 WL 5567587, at *7. The court held that because FanDuel does not risk its own money on the contests, it cannot be a winner or a loser under the Loss Recovery Act. Because the court specifically declined to address whether daily fantasy sports contests constitute illegal gambling under Illinois law, the case has no bearing on the instant inquiry.

We are also aware of four lawsuits pending in the Federal courts in Illinois involving DraftKings and/or FanDuel. *Izsak v. DraftKings, Inc.*, No. 14-cv-7952 (N.D. Ill. (2014)) (A class action alleging that DraftKings violated the Federal Telephone Consumer Protection Act (47 U.S.C. §227 *et seq.* (2012)) by sending unsolicited text messages to the cell phones of the plaintiff and the class members.); *Hemrich v. DraftKings, Inc.*, No. 3:15-cv-445 (S.D. Ill. (2015)) (A class action alleging that DraftKings violated the Illinois consumer fraud statute (815 ILCS 505/1 *et seq.* (West 2014)) and Missouri law by misleading consumers into believing that their initial deposit would be doubled through a "100% First-Time Deposit Bonus" and seeking money damages in the amounts of the doubled first-time deposits that the plaintiffs did not receive. The complaint specifically alleges that "DraftKings' business is a legal one under United States law[,]," citing the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act of 2006 (31 U.S.C. §5362(1)(E)(ix) (2012). *Hemrich* Complaint at 4, ¶18.); *Guarino v. DraftKings, Inc. and FanDuel, Inc.*, No. 3:15-cv-1123 (S.D. Ill. (2015)) (A class action alleging that DraftKings and FanDuel fraudulently induced plaintiff and the class members into paying money to participate by claiming the games were fair games of skill without the potential for insiders to use non-public information to compete against them when, in fact, the defendants willfully failed to disclose that employees of DraftKings and FanDuel had valuable, non-public data and would use this information to compete against plaintiff and the class members. The complaint seeks a full refund for all of the money paid to the defendants by the class members, damages and restitution, or other equitable relief. As part of the allegations, the complaint states that daily fantasy sports contests are "not gambling because of the skill involved in picking a winning team." *Guarino* Complaint at 6, ¶ 29.); *Stoddart v. DraftKings, Inc.*, No. 3:15-cv-1307 (S.D. Ill. (2015)) (A class action brought on behalf of a plaintiff who participated in DraftKings' contests and lost money and others similarly situated. The complaint alleges that DraftKings' daily fantasy sports contests are illegal gambling under Illinois law and seeks an order requiring DraftKings to disgorge all of the money wagered and lost by the plaintiff and the class members.). Only the *Stoddart* case raises the question of whether daily fantasy sports contests violate Illinois criminal law. The court has not reached that issue, however. The case is currently subject to an Order to Stay proceedings, pending the resolution of a Multidistrict Litigation transfer motion. Order, *Stoddart v. DraftKings, Inc.*, No. 3:15-cv-1307 (S.D. Ill. December 16, 2015).

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(a) A person commits gambling when he or she:

(1) knowingly plays a game of chance or skill for money or other thing of value, unless excepted in subsection (b) of this Section;

* * *

(12) knowingly establishes, maintains, or operates an Internet site that permits a person to play a game of chance or skill for money or other thing of value by means of the Internet or to make a wager upon the result of any game, contest, political nomination, appointment, or election by means of the Internet. This item (12) does not apply to activities referenced in items (6) and (6.1) of subsection (b) of this Section.^[5]

Subsection 28-1(b) of the Criminal Code (720 ILCS 5/28-1(b) (West 2014)) exempts certain activities from the general prohibition on gambling. The Contest Organizers contend that the following exception applies to the daily fantasy sports contests they offer:

(b) Participants in any of the following activities shall not be convicted of gambling:

* * *

(2) Offers of prizes, award or compensation to the actual contestants in any bona fide contest for the determination of skill, speed, strength or endurance or to the owners of animals or vehicles entered in such contest.

⁵Subsections 28-1(b)(6) and 28-1(b)(6.1) of the Criminal Code (720 ILCS 5/28-1(b)(6), (b)(6.1) (West 2014)) respectively exempt from the illegal gambling prohibitions lotteries conducted by the State of Illinois in accordance with the Illinois Lottery Law (20 ILCS 1605/1 *et seq.* (West 2014)) and the online purchase of lottery tickets for a lottery conducted by the State of Illinois under the program established in section 7.12 of the Illinois Lottery Law (20 ILCS 1605/7.12 (West 2014)).

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The offense of gambling is a Class A misdemeanor under Illinois law. A second or subsequent conviction under subsections 28-1(a)(3) through (a)(12) of the Criminal Code is a Class 4 felony. 720 ILCS 5/28-1(c) (West 2014).

The primary purpose of statutory construction is to ascertain and give effect to the intent of the General Assembly. *Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services v. Warner*, 227 Ill. 2d 223, 229 (2008). Legislative intent is best evidenced by the language used in the statute, and where statutory language is clear and unambiguous, it must be given effect as written. *DeLuna v. Burciaga*, 223 Ill. 2d 49, 59 (2006). One must view all of the provisions of the statute as a whole. *Land v. Board of Education of the City of Chicago*, 202 Ill. 2d 414, 422 (2002). Words and phrases should not be construed in isolation, but interpreted in light of other relevant portions of the statute. *Land*, 202 Ill. 2d at 422. Illinois criminal statutes must be narrowly construed in favor of the accused. *People v. Williams*, 239 Ill. 2d 119, 127 (2010); *People v. Christensen*, 102 Ill. 2d 321, 328 (1984).

Subsection 28-1(a)(1) of the Criminal Code provides that a person commits the offense of gambling when he or she "knowingly plays a game of chance or skill for money[,]" unless excepted in subsection 28-1(b). The statutory language is straightforward and unequivocal. It clearly declares that *all* games of chance *or* skill, when played for money, are illegal gambling in Illinois, unless excepted. While the Contest Organizers assert that daily

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fantasy sports contests are games of skill⁶ rather than games of chance, that argument is immaterial because subsection 28-1(a)(1) expressly encompasses both. Moreover, participants must pay an entry fee or buy-in amount in order to win a prize. Consequently, the act of playing daily fantasy sports contests in Illinois constitutes illegal gambling under subsection 28-1(a)(1) of the Criminal Code, unless otherwise excepted.

Pursuant to subsection 28-1(a)(12) of the Criminal Code, a person also commits gambling when he or she "knowingly establishes, maintains, or operates an Internet site that permits a person to play a game of chance or skill for money or other thing of value by means of the Internet or to make a wager upon the result of any game[.]" The Contest Organizers operate websites that allow individuals to play games of chance or skill for money. Accordingly, entities which operate such contests commit the offense of gambling under Illinois law, unless otherwise excepted. *See Cie v. Comdata Network, Inc.*, 275 Ill. App. 3d 759, 764-65 (1995), *appeal denied*, 165 Ill. 2d 548 (1996) (subsection 28-1(b) exceptions apply to all gambling prohibitions in subsection 28-1(a)).

Subsection 28-1(b) of the Criminal Code sets out the only exceptions to activities that otherwise would constitute gambling under subsection 28-1(a). The Contest Organizers assert that their contests are excepted under subsection 28-1(b)(2). This subsection was included in the original enactment of article 28 of the Criminal Code of 1961 (*see* 1961 Ill. Laws 1983,

⁶*See* FanDuel Website, *available at* <https://fanduel.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/210202858-Is-FanDuel-legal>; DraftKings Website, *available at* <https://www.draftkings.com/help/why-is-it-legal>.

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2033-37; Ill. Rev. Stat. 1961, ch. 38, par. 28-1 *et seq.*) and exempts "[o]ffers of prizes, award or compensation to *the actual contestants* in any bona fide contest for the determination of skill, speed, strength or endurance or to the owners of animals or vehicles entered in such contest."⁷

(Emphasis added.)

Reading the statute as a whole, it is clear that subsection 28-1(b)(2) applies only to the "actual contestants" in the actual sporting event.⁸ In the context of daily fantasy sports, the "actual contestant" upon whose performance success or failure is based is the athlete or athletes whose "skill, speed, strength or endurance" determine the outcome. Thus, subsection 28-1(b)(2) exempts only those who actually engage in a *bona fide* contest for the determination of skill, speed, strength, or endurance, and not a daily fantasy sports contest participant who pays a fee to build a "team" and who may win a prize based on the statistical performance of particular athletes. In this regard, persons whose wagers depend upon how particular, selected athletes perform in actual sporting events stand in no different stead than persons who wager on the outcome of any sporting event in which they are not participants. None of these persons are the

⁷There is only one Illinois case which cites to this exception. In *People v. Mitchell*, 111 Ill. App. 3d 1026, 1028 (1983), the court upheld a jury's conclusion that "Hold 'em" poker was not a "bona fide contest for the determination of skill" under subsection 28-1(b)(2). The court held that the evidence supported the jury's conclusion that "the games, in fact, required a combination of skill and chance, and that they were definitely not the type of 'bona fide contests' excepted from subsection [28-1](a)(1)." (Emphasis in original.) *Mitchell*, 111 Ill. App. 3d at 1028.

⁸The Contest Organizers have not suggested that daily fantasy sports contests involve determining the speed, strength, or endurance of the fantasy sports participants who enter the contests, nor could such a suggestion be made in good faith.

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actual contestants in a *bona fide* contest for the determination of skill, speed, strength, or endurance.

This interpretation is consistent with a 1994 opinion of the Texas Attorney General's Office construing substantially similar statutory language to that found in subsection 28-1(b)(2) of the Criminal Code. Tex. Att'y Gen. Op. No. LO-94-051, issued June 9, 1994. In that opinion, the Texas Attorney General's office addressed whether a contest which requires an entry fee, pays prizes to winners, and is based on forecasting the outcomes of a number of sporting events constitute illegal gambling under Texas law.⁹ The Texas Attorney General's Office concluded that the contest at issue did not fall within the gambling exception and therefore constituted illegal gambling:

We cannot think of any distinction the words "*actual* contestants" could be intended to make other than that between those actually participating in a contest and able by their performance to affect its outcome, and those merely betting on it. Thus, while the subsection (1)(B) exclusion may embrace athletes actually competing in the sporting events you refer to, it does not embrace

⁹See Texas Penal Code §47.01(1)(B) (2015), available at <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/docs/PE/pdf/PE.47.pdf>, which provides, in pertinent part:

(1) "Bet" means an agreement to win or lose something of value solely or partially by chance. A bet does not include:

* * *

(B) an offer of a prize, award, or compensation to the actual contestants in a bona fide contest for the determination of skill, speed, strength, or endurance or to the owners of animals, vehicles, watercraft, or aircraft entered in a contest[.]

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those who pay entry fees for a chance to win a prize from forecasting the outcome of the events. (Emphasis in original.) Tex. Att'y Gen. Op. No. LO94-051 at 2.¹⁰

Although daily fantasy sports contests may involve some degree of skill, such as selecting an athlete for a participant's team based on knowledge of the athlete's historical

¹⁰The New York Supreme Court recently made this same distinction when granting the New York Attorney General's motions to enjoin the Contest Organizers from accepting entry fees from New York State consumers for any daily fantasy sports contests which they operate, pending a final determination. *See* Decision and Order for Injunctive Relief, *People ex rel. Schneiderman v. DraftKings, Inc.*, No. 453054/2015 (N.Y. Sup. Ct., New York County, December 11, 2015); Decision and Order for Injunctive Relief, *People ex rel. Schneiderman v. FanDuel, Inc.*, No. 453056/2015 (N.Y. Sup. Ct., New York County, December 11, 2015) (Decisions and Orders). New York law defines "gambling" as follows:

A person engages in gambling when he stakes or risks something of value upon the outcome of a contest of chance or a future contingent event not under his control or influence, upon an agreement or understanding that he will receive something of value in the event of a certain outcome. (Emphasis added.) N.Y. Penal Law §225.00(2) (2015), available at <http://public.leginfo.state.ny.us/lawsrch.cgi?NVLWO:>.

The New York Attorney General argued that the participants paid entry fees "on events they cannot control or influence, relying on the real-game performance of professional athletes, to win a prize, which amounts to gambling" under New York law. Decisions and Orders, at 5. The New York Attorney General further argued that daily fantasy sports contests are "contests of chance" because the outcome depends substantially on chance and factors not within the participant's control, and that once a team is chosen for a contest, there is no means of altering the outcome. Decisions and Orders, at 6. The court concluded that the language of the statute "is broadly worded and as currently written sufficient for finding that DFS [daily fantasy sports] involves illegal gambling." Decisions and Orders, at 7. The Contest Organizers immediately appealed the court's decision. Notice of Appeal, *People ex rel. Schneiderman v. DraftKings, Inc.*, No. 453054/2015 (N.Y. Sup. Ct., New York County, December 11, 2015); Notice of Appeal, *People ex rel. Schneiderman v. FanDuel, Inc.*, No. 453056/2015 (N.Y. Sup. Ct., New York County, December 11, 2015). The New York Supreme Court, Appellate Division granted an interim stay of the enforcement of the injunction against FanDuel pending a determination by a full panel. Notice of Entry of Appellate Division Interim Stay Order, *People ex rel. Schneiderman v. FanDuel, Inc.*, No. 453056/2015 (N.Y. Sup. Ct., New York County, December 11, 2015).

Additionally, the Kansas Legislature recently amended its gambling statute, which contains a substantially similar exclusion for "offers of purses, prizes or premiums to the actual contestants in any bona fide contest for the determination of skill, speed, strength or endurance or to the bona fide owners of animals or vehicles entered in such a contest[.]" to also exclude "a fantasy sports league as defined in this section[.]" Kan. Stat. Ann. §§21-6403(a)(2), (a)(9) (2014), as amended by 2015 Kan. Sess. Laws 835-38, available at http://www.sos.ks.gov/pubs/sessionlaws/2015/2015_Session_Laws_Volume_1.pdf.

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performance, match-up against a particular opponent, performance in a particular venue, and/or performance in particular weather conditions, the phrase "actual contestants" as used in subsection 28-1(b)(2) does not apply to those persons who pay entry fees for a chance to win a prize for forecasting the performance of professional or college athletes over whom they have no control or influence. Accordingly, it is my opinion that subsection 28-1(b)(2) does not exempt daily fantasy sports contests from the Illinois gambling provisions.

CONCLUSION

It is my opinion that the daily fantasy sports contests offered by FanDuel and DraftKings clearly constitute gambling under subsection 28-1(a) of the Criminal Code of 2012 and that the exemption set forth in subsection 28-1(b)(2) of the Criminal Code does not apply.

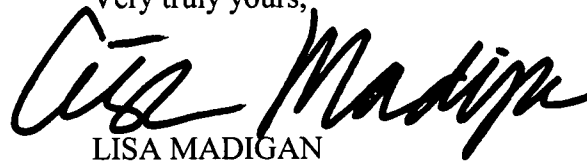
In closing, I note that there is legislation currently pending in each chamber of the Illinois General Assembly which proposes, in part, to create a new Act – the Fantasy Contests Act – and to exempt "fantasy contests as defined under the Fantasy Contests Act" from the general prohibition against gambling. *See* 99th Ill. Gen. Assem., House Bill 4323, Senate Bill 2193, 2015 Sess.¹¹ Thus, it appears that a number of General Assembly members have reached this same conclusion, as they have agreed to sponsor the foregoing legislation. Absent legislation

¹¹House Bill 4323 was referred to the House Rules Committee on November 9, 2015. Senate Bill 2193 was referred to the Senate Assignments Committee on November 3, 2015. Previously-filed legislation proposing to create the Daily Fantasy Sports Regulation Act contained only a short title provision and was referred to the House Rules Committee on April 14, 2015. *See* 99th Ill. Gen. Assem., House Bill 4200, 2015 Sess.

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specifically exempting daily fantasy sports contests from the gambling provisions, it is my
opinion that daily fantasy sports contests constitute illegal gambling under Illinois law.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Madigan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lisa" written in a smaller, more compact script than the last name "Madigan".

LISA MADIGAN
ATTORNEY GENERAL