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May 30, 2019

To: Chairman Scott Oelslager
Vice Chairman Gary Scherer
Ranking Member Jack Cera
Members of the House Finance Committee

From: Aaron Baer
President, Citizens for Community Values

Re: Opposition to HB 194 and the expansion of gambling in Ohio

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chairman Scherer, Ranking Member Cera and Members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Aaron Baer and I am the president of Citizens for Community Values, Ohio's Family Policy Council. Our advocacy is deeply influenced by our core belief in the importance of family, and our care for the impoverished.

It is because we care so deeply for families and for the poorest Ohioans that we implore you to reject HB 194 and any attempts to expand the lottery with sports betting and bring more exploitative gaming to the state.

There is a great allure for lawmakers to pass the creation of this so-called "sports gaming lottery" – the potential revenue is always a bonus. Furthermore, I know many on this committee like to take a "libertarian" stance on issues like the expansion of gambling.

Yet the costs of HB 194 far outweigh the financial gains for Ohio, and there is a wide chasm between supporting individual liberty, and the state establishing massive programs to profit off of the hopes and dreams of the poor.

There are few issues today that are as gravely misunderstood as gambling and the lottery. When many people think of gambling, they often imagine what they see perpetuated on TV and in movies - young successful business men and women having a fun night out with friends and betting with disposable income.

Or they think of betting against a friend on the outcome of the Ohio State-Michigan game.

Yet this is very different than what is being proposed here. HB 194 is a state-run program in which the state is profiting off of addicted gamblers and the aspirations of the impoverished.

The reality is the people who are purchasing our lottery tickets are most often those that can least afford it.



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According to a 2012 study, 61% of all lottery players are from the bottom fifth socio-economic bracket. ¹The majority of lottery tickets are purchased in low-income neighborhoods.

Think about the last time you saw a lottery billboard in Ohio – was it in Worthington? Or Indian Hill? Or Lakewood? Or was it in an impoverished neighborhood?

And make no mistake, the reason such powerful special interests are pushing this legislation is because, like the existing lottery, this “sports gaming lottery” is a program that is stacked against the bettor, ensuring that the house essentially always wins.

This is especially egregious when you consider how advocates for expanding the lottery try to justify the massive toll it takes on our communities by using those funds for education.

But stop and consider what we are doing – we are luring Ohio’s poorest citizens to play games that are statistically stacked against them so we can, in part, fund Worthington, Indian Hill, and Lakewood schools.

The truth is the lottery and HB 194 are a reverse Robin Hood – taking from the poor and giving to the rich.

HB 194 creates a host of other problems for Ohio families as well:

- Ohio children will be bombarded with sports-betting advertising – manipulative ads created to make children think betting is a fundamental part of athletics, and that gambling is a realistic approach to creating wealth.
- Ohio is a state that loves our sporting events from the Buckeyes, to the Tribe, to the Blue Jackets, to the Bengals, our sports teams are at the heart of our communities. Introducing sports betting into Ohio can undermine the integrity of these competitions, as it has in other areas. For example, tennis has been ravaged by match-fixing in recent years. A 2018 survey of 3,200 players at all levels of the professional game found that 14.5% had first-hand knowledge of match-fixing – 464 players in total.²
- The potential of allowing gambling on mobile devices is an avenue to cultivating more gaming addicts in Ohio. We are already seeing an epidemic of people – especially young people – being addicted to cell phone usage.
- Mobile gaming is already designed to create addicts – as the website Addiction.com explains, gaming apps are designed to increase dopamine levels, just like drugs increase dopamine levels:

“Game developers keep you hooked by using strategies designed to increase a player’s dopamine levels. Dopamine is a brain chemical responsible for controlling your emotions

¹ Gambling on the Lottery: Sociodemographic Correlates Across the Lifespan

Grace Barnes-John Welte-Marie-Cecile Tidwell-Joseph Hoffman - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21132521>

² Tennis Has 'serious Integrity Problem' with Betting, Says Independent Review

Sean Ingle - <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/apr/25/tennis-serious-integrity-problem-betting-match-fixing-independent-review>



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and feelings of pleasure. Playing video games will increase a player's dopamine levels upon completing a difficult level, or earning a reward of some kind.

Increased dopamine levels are a major contributing factor to most addiction types, including addiction to substances such as alcohol, heroin, and prescription drugs. Those who struggle with addiction often drink more alcohol and use higher doses of drugs in an effort to achieve higher dopamine levels. In instances of video game addiction, players spend more money and more time on games that help them achieve heightened feelings of reward and pleasure.”³

Lastly, I'd like to express serious concern over the constitutionality of the bill – when voters approved expansion of gambling in 2009, it was on a very limited basis at the four casinos. Attempting to place the expansion of gambling under the Lottery Control Commission seems like a veiled attempt to side step the voters' wishes to keep gambling limited. To date, we are analyzing this and other proposed legislation to see how it gets out of line with the Ohio Constitution.

Members of the Finance Committee, HB 194 is gambling with Ohio's future. And just like when you play the lottery, it's a certainty that under HB 194 Ohio will lose, and the gambling industry will win.

Citizens for Community Values (CCV) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that endeavors to create an Ohio where God's blessings of life, family, and religious freedom are treasured, respected, and protected.

www.ccv.org -- (513) 733-5775

³ A New Addiction on the Rise: Mobile Game Addiction
<https://www.addictions.com/blog/a-new-addiction-on-the-rise-mobile-game-addiction/>