

Good morning, Chairman Oelslager

Vice Chair, Scherer

Representatives

My name is Mary Ann Bassitt, proudly from Columbus and I am a very concerned citizen. I wrote an op ed that was published in the Columbus Dispatch, I was invited to Senator Eklund's interested parties meeting, met with Senator Eklund and Representative Greenspan personally, I volunteer on a national level with Stop Predatory Gambling.org. And I am here to focus on whether HB194 is in the best interest of the people of Ohio.

With Ohio able to pass law allowing sports gambling, Representatives Greenspan and Kelly and the gambling companies - MGM, Penn National and others unknown, have been spending a lot of time together writing legislation to legalize sports gambling. MGM's 2018 revenues were \$11.8 billion, Penn's \$3.6 billion. The casino industry is one of the biggest lobbyists in the country.

There is a heartbreaking story in our state of Scott Stevens. Scott was from Steubenville, married with three girls, living a double life, a Chief Operating Officer with a Masters degree and a slot machine addict, who embezzled nearly \$4 million dollars from his employer to feed his addiction. Scott Stevens committed suicide in 2012 because he thought his family only had a chance if he weren't around to bring them further down. More gambling will lead to more problems: financial loss, addiction, stress on families, ruined families and maybe even suicide, like Scott Stevens. This is all too common. One in 5 gambling addicts attempts suicide! Gambling addiction has the highest rate of suicide of all addictions. This will be the sad legacy if the proposed legislation passes.

Gambling has been recognized as a behavioral addiction because of its powerful effects on the brain's reward system. We all know the addictive nature of smart phones and sports and gambling and this is downright "dangerous".

Let's take a closer look at the players in this game:

The Gambler –

For millions of Americans, the lure of gambling leads to life-changing gambling addiction, anyone can develop the problem. Younger males prefer sports gambling and this is a real concern. Often times gamblers lead a double life, like Scott Stevens. They incur significant financial losses, thinking that he or she will "win it all back" if they just keep trying. They won't! Many addicted gamblers take from their savings or retirement accounts, borrow money from their family, take out personal loans, payday loans and or cash advances on credit cards or steal from others. A gambler's life becomes a downward spiral of mounting debt. According to psychiatrist Jon Grant, author of, *Why Can't I Stop*,

he says, addiction depends on a person's vulnerability, which is affected by genetics, trauma and depression, among other factors. Addiction is not a moral failing, he says.

Researchers and politicians have begun to raise the same question of gambling machines that is often asked of consumer products like cigarettes, alcohol, firearms . . . Are the problems in the product, the user, or their interaction? "An independent federal commission in Australia concluded in 2010 that "the problems experienced by gamblers - many just ordinary consumers - are as much a consequence of the technology of the games, their accessibility and the nature and conduct of the venues, as they are a consequence of the traits of the consumer themselves."

"Some researchers point out that it is misleading to measure the problem by counting only those individuals who fit . . . "problem" gambler, since most individuals who regularly gamble will at some point experience the hallmark features of problem gambling behavior - namely difficulty controlling time and money spent on the activity, with negative consequences."

We've all felt the mild rush of dopamine when anticipating a pleasurable experience such as a vacation or perhaps a shopping excursion. Like that, gambling can create a pleasurable rush which can become an insatiable craving. In a fascinating, yet disturbing article in National Geographic, September 2017, "The Science of Addiction, The Addicted Brain", states, "We're learning more about the craving that fuels self-defeating habits - and how science can help fight it." The article outlines how the brain gets rewired by the consistent stimulus of gambling. Gambling has a powerful effect on the brain. The brain loses its ability to reason and creates a strong desire for the high that gambling provides. This addiction is similar to those from opioids and cocaine. Gambling addiction is a progressive disease which worsens over time. Like tobacco, one puff on a cigarette you won't get cancer but over time you may.

The Gambling Industry –

Not long ago, casinos and sports betting were concentrated in Las Vegas and Atlantic City. Over time, casinos spread to Indian reservations and river boats and then to Ohio cities and now possibly a casino in your hand, on your smart phone on your computer. From the Bureau of Problem Gambling, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, "The first three attempts to approve casinos in Ohio were placed on the ballot as "Issues" to be approved. They were each defeated by a sound margin. The fourth try was on the ballot as a Constitutional Amendment and had many millions of dollars of advertising behind it." It won by a very small margin. Seems to me, Ohio didn't want casinos back then if it needed four tries to pass. Now, companies such as Fan Duel and Draft Kings has fantasy sports betting and MGM, Penn National and others have come to our state pushing sports betting.

Ohio is introducing a new product with HB194 - sports gambling. This product has a lot of similarities to slot machines. Slot machines have proven to be a highly addictive. Scientists have found addiction

hijacks the brains neural pathways. The slot machines and the entire environment around them have specifically been designed to be addictive. Slot machines are by far the biggest money maker with 70% - 75% of casino revenue in tourist locations and over 90% revenue in other casinos locations. Casinos are transferring their addictive product knowledge and design of slot machines into mobile and on line sport betting with casino games such as black jack to follow.

What have we learn about the slot machines that we can apply here to sports betting?

Natasha Dow Schull has a PhD from UC Berkeley, with 15 years of research in Las Vegas on slot machine design, the casino industry and its effects on human behavior. Her research is the industry leading book about the casinos. She wrote the stunning and frightening, 300 page book, *Addiction by Design*. As the title of the book is meant to emphasize, the story of problem gambling is not just a story of problem gamblers, it is a story of problem machines, problem environments and problem business practices. Her research and op eds have been featured on 60 Minutes, NY Times, The Economist, The Atlantic, Washington Post, Forbes, NPR and more. Ms. Schull describes how historically simple machines like the "One Armed Bandit" have evolved into sophisticated machines that deliberately enhance and sustain the "zone". The "zone" is the state of mind where people escape daily life as they lose track of monetary value. Her research has proved 3 main things that make slot machines so addictive:

- 1. immersion** - player gets into "the zone". A mental state where time and space falls away and monetary value fades and they lose track of losses.
- 2. continuity** - go from the end of one game to the start of another, with no delay.
- 3. speed** - event frequency is intensifying, gives people no time to think. Playing not to win but to continue playing.

Sports betting has these same qualities:

- 1. immersion** – yes, guys are already drawn in because bond through sports and they can be either alone or in groups. Fans (short for fanatics) get so wrapped up: in our teams, championships games, ncaa basketball road to the final 4. Watching pre game shows and the games with stats and odds on devoted betting channels or on the screens while games are going on - screaming loud, cheering, your excited, happy, they are partying, so many football games going on all day during the weekends and most evenings.
- 2. continuity** – yes, multiple bets at the same time in the course of sporting events that can last for hours from noon until late in the evening, "in-game" betting - so many different betting options like teaser bets, prop bets, real time pop-up bets marketed at a moments notice, cash out options - all going on at the same time in the same game. The brain is waiting for the next, the next, the next. Gambler doesn't need to wait too long for a play bet happen. Taking away better judgment. Losing track of loses.

3. speed - multiple bets which create rapidly wagering, "event frequency", betting over short periods of time with no time to think, with multiple games going on at once. Again this "in-game" betting will be moving quickly. Again, losing track of loses will be easy because they can't keep it all straight. This is not betting of the old days - one bet of a modest amount next week on the outcome of the game.

Studies have shown accessibility to gambling problems is a contributing factor to progressive gambling problems. Now, the phone (or machine) is right in the bettors hand. They don't have to leave their comfy couch.

I believe sports betting could be a highly addictive product for people in Ohio. This is why I am so concerned.

State Legislators –

Legislators are controlling the narrative by focusing on who is going to regulate sports gambling, the lottery or the Ohio Casino Commission Control - not focusing on whether sports betting is in the best interest of our people. Senator Eklund says "My sense right now is, yeah, there is very likely an appetite for this in the Buckeye State". Really? There is also an "appetite" in Ohio for other harmful behaviors like opioids. The Ohio Legislature considers those a problem. Why not sports gambling?

What do others think -

Warren Buffet: there is an insightful video where he talks about gambling is selling a false hope and it is a distribution of wealth from the poor to the rich. Plus he said "I find it socially revolting when a government preys on its citizens rather than serving them. A government shouldn't make it easy for people to take their social security checks and (waste them pulling) a handle."

Jim Harbaugh: University of Michigan football coach was asked about sports betting: "Don't gamble. Avoid it like the plague. Don't walk away from that, run."

Marshall Athletic Director, Mike Hamrick: said on 60 minutes last March: "It's gambling. It can be handled to a certain extent. But nobody can sit here and tell you that they can deal with this and be 100 percent clean ... they can't."

The Columbus Dispatch: is skeptical that legalized sports betting will, on balance, be good for Ohio.

Myself: of all the people I have mentioned this new law to, most everyone was against it.

Other thoughts -

The family history this will create . . . can you imagine a father teaching a son how to gamble, a once taboo subject. Would any of you sports gamble in front of your kids, teach your sons, your daughters, son-laws, grandkids how to gamble? If you can't say you would . . . then why would you vote yes?

Ohio Department of Mental Health thought it was important enough to partner with Ohio for Responsible Gambling to create a new program called, "Change the Game Ohio". This is to educate parents, teachers and others on the risk with games kids play and how it may be a gateway to gambling. They provide information on the risks and warning signs of youth problem gambling. Shocking! Loot boxes and instant upgrades. As if parents don't have enough to worry about with school shootings and vaping! 450,000 UK children aged 11 to 16 bet regularly, more than those who have taken drugs, smoke or drank alcohol.

Gambling ads seem to be everywhere, on billboards, tv and subtly on the Fan talk radio. I don't see tobacco companies advertising.

And the veterans - I am alarmed that sports betting will be easily available because they already have suicide problems and mental health issues.

What Can We Do -

Please do not push this legislation through! The narrative is being controlled with who is going to regulate sports gambling . . . instead of . . . is sports gambling good for people in Ohio. Sometimes it is good to not be first to market. Be a "lagger" in this case: study the data from other states, see the effects sports betting has on people, families, sports and kids. This seems like a reasonable and measured approach with such a new market. Secondly, have more committee meetings and invite industry experts like Ms. Schull on how sports betting will effect the population.

From my perspective government exists to protect citizens. This bill to me is setting people up to fail. Las Vegas wasn't built on winners. This bill will make gambling mainstream, legitimizing it and glamorizing it through sports. Common sense, history and research already indicate sports betting will not be good for the health and finances for the people of Ohio.

Thank you,

Mary Ann Bassitt

