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House Bill 194 Testimony

My name is Ashley Hartman and I work in the field of problem gambling prevention. I have worked in a variety of settings including high schools, colleges, jails and addiction treatment centers. As a professional in this field, I know most people are able to gamble without negative consequences, yet for those that it leads to addiction it wreaks havoc on families, workplaces and communities. It is therefore the responsibility of the state to ensure appropriate consumer protections are put into place to protect those vulnerable to this addiction. As the bill is current introduced, many important consumer protections are included. To adequately protect Ohioans, three additional protections must be included.

Firstly, sports wagering should be limited to professional U.S. sports. Young adults are the highest risk population for problem gambling. Allowing sports betting on collegiate sports is irresponsibly, and puts the future of young Ohioans at risk.

I have worked with individuals that were bookies in college, threatening their athletic careers. Once, after completing a problem gambling program at a college, the next group coming into the room was a fraternity hosting a poker night as a recruitment event. Already illegal gambling is common at Ohio colleges and universities, so efforts are needed to be put in place to ensure sports gambling does not cause further issues for our young people.

Secondly, the appropriate regulatory body for sports betting is the Ohio Casino Control Commission. This is the only agency in the state tasked solely with regulating gambling. Their expertise and impartial position make them the appropriate regulator. The Ohio Lottery Commission is tasked with raising funds through gambling in addition to self-regulating. This could put OLC in a difficult position, which can be avoided if the OCCC regulates sport gambling.

Finally, sports betting should be limited to gambling venues, such as casinos and racinos. These sites have responsibly gambling programs. Sporting gambling at veteran clubs and fraternal organizations not only puts veterans and older adults at risk for problem gambling, as they are high risk populations, but also these organizations do not have the resources necessary to sufficiently promote responsible gaming practices.

Ohio families have been devastated by problem gambling. They have lost homes, careers and loved ones to suicide. I urge the members of the committee to remember these families as they determine the most responsible implementation of sports gambling in Ohio.