

Steven H. Kapela MSW, LISW, LICDC-GAMB, ICGC II  
6623 Santo Lane  
Toledo Ohio, 43537  
skapela@zepfcenter.org  
Cell: 419-377-6046

October 6th, 2019

Chairman Oeslager, Vice Chariman Scherer, and Ranking Member Cera. Thank you for providing the opportunity for me to submit written testimony as an interested party regarding HB194.

My name is Steve Kapela, I am Manager of Gambling Treatment and Prevention at the Zepf Center in Toledo, Ohio. I also serve on the Board of Directors for both the Problem Gambling Network of Ohio (PGNO) and the Problem Gambling Advisory Board (PGAB) of Ohio. In my capacity at Zepf Center, I manage one of the largest problem gambling treatment programs in Ohio, having served over 130 diagnosed problem gamblers in fiscal year 2019. This high number of clients served is directly related to our program being directly imbedded into Zepf Centers Substance Use Disorder (SUD) programs in Toledo. Through screening and assessment we have consistently identified nearly 20% of our nearly 1000 (average enrollment all programs) SUD clients as also meeting the criteria for gambling disorder. Ohio's opioid crisis is actually an addiction crisis and gambling is clearly part of that narrative.

I address the committee today as neither a supporter nor an opponent; my aim is to represent those who already struggle with addictions or those on the borderline of engaging in disordered gambling behaviors. In 2012, before the opening of any Ohio casinos, the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) conducted a gambling prevalence study that indicated that 95% of people, who gambled, did so without issue, the committee may remember the Ohio "Be the 95%" campaign. In 2017, OhioMHAS conducted a more comprehensive follow-up study (attached) which found that from 2012 to 2017 problem gambling rates increased from 5% to 10.3%, more than doubling in approximately 5 years. While it may be easy to blame the casinos for the increase, it seems the true culprit may have been the increased availability of all forms of gambling. It is the increase of gambling availability and accessibility which I believe are responsible for a more than 100% increase of both problem and disordered gambling within 5 short years.

It is with this history in mind that I reach out to the committee and ask all concerned that they consider amendments to the bill which maximizes and enhances consumer protections for Ohio citizens. Ohio has proven to be a leader in the nation as it relates to problem gambling treatment and prevention services, funding, and the training of gambling counselors. It is important that these efforts be not only recognized but also enriched.

HB194 has some positive consumer protections but needs to go further. I offer the following suggestions as bullet points.

- Ohio should proceed slowly and limit its initial offering of eligible games and events to professional sports only.
- Collegiate or other amateur wagering should be not be included in HB194
- Sports wagering should be limited to Ohio's 4 Casinos and 7 Racinos.
- The regulatory agency should be the Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC) due to its unique ability to regulate complex gaming involving both luck and skill, in place Voluntary Exclusion Program (VEP) and lack of need to walk the line between promotion and regulation as the Ohio Lottery would.

Sports betting in Ohio will move forward. It is the responsibility of all concerned to make sure that this will happened in a way that protects Ohio citizens.

Addiction itself needs no supporters and Ohio HB194 must be crafted in a way that meets the needs of all Ohioans. Understanding that it is those already affected by other addictions and those on the borderline of disordered gambling that will suffer the consequences of a poorly constructed bill or legislation. I ask the committee to move slowly, with purpose. Let Ohio learn from the mistakes of others who rushed into sports gambling. With careful deliberation and robust consumer protections, Ohioans can enjoy this new form of recreation while protecting the most vulnerable among us. In Lucas County alone, OhioMHAS estimates there are over 3600 gamblers who currently would meet the criteria of gambling disorder. How many more will cross the borderline into problem gambling with the addition of poorly regulated sports gambling. We owe it to all Ohioans to be as diligent as possible.

Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony as an interested party and citizen. I would be happy to answering any questions the committee may have. Please contact me at your pleasure.

Citations;

Sherba, T., Linley, J., & Frohnapfel-Hasson, S. (2017). Ohio Gambling Survey 2016-17. Columbus, OH: Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.