

Proponent Testimony for HB 282
Ohio House Finance Committee
October 24, 2019
Mitch Given, Director
Ohio Veterans & Fraternal Charitable Coalition

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chairman Scherer, Ranking Member Cera and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 282.

The Ohio Veterans & Fraternal Charitable Coalition is an organization formed to address issues of mutual interest among Ohio's largest veteran and fraternal organizations, including the American Legion, VFW, AMVETS, Eagles, Elks, Moose and other fraternal groups. We represent over 2,100 locations in local communities across Ohio.

As you will hear today, these organization and the charitable dollars they donate are vital to their communities. They serve as local hubs of activity and outreach, they support veterans, and they donate millions of dollars each year to local causes.

With me today are:

- Dan Faulkner, State Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Ohio
- Don McCauley, Executive Director of the AMVETS Department of Ohio
- Suzette Heller, Adjutant, American Legion Department of Ohio
- Michael Farmer, Commander, AMVETS Post 1983 in Hamilton Ohio

These veterans group leaders and charities will share with you the positive impact their organizations have on our state and why modernizing their fundraising capabilities is so important.

First, I'd like to give you some background on charitable gaming. In 1975 the legislature gave veterans and fraternal organizations the ability to conduct paper forms of charitable gaming. Since then, as technology has improved and other non-charitable electronic forms of gaming have been legalized in Ohio, veterans and fraternal groups are still restricted to only playing paper forms of instant bingo.

HB 282 would permit electronic forms of instant bingo. This bill simply allows our organizations to modernize by using electronic devices to play the same charitable games they have already been playing for years.

It's also worth pointing out that these are private clubs and are not open to the general public. Only members and guest may enter the locations and participate in charitable gaming.

The proceeds of charitable gaming have an incredible impact on our communities. Ohio law already requires veterans and fraternal organizations to donate twenty-five percent of instant bingo proceeds directly to outside charities, most of which supports worthy causes in the local communities where the organizations are located.

I'll give you just one example: Last year, the American Legion post in Bellville Ohio donated nearly \$20,000 to local organizations, which included \$2800 to the local boy & girl scouts organizations, \$1500 to the local police department, \$1000 to the veterans honor flight program, \$8000 to the schools for supplies, \$2,000 to help pay utility bills and food costs for those in need, and \$1,000 for youth sports. The post also spends about \$50,000 per year in the local community to pay for food, building maintenance and repair supplies and costs associated with running the post.

This is just one post in one community. Like many communities, Belleville also has an AMVETS post, as well as, VFW, Elks and Eagles clubs nearby. The financial impact these organizations have on their regions is tremendous. Imagine this same impact multiplied in nearly every community across the state, all at zero cost to taxpayers.

Most of our organizations also have state charities. For instance, the VFW Department of Ohio has a state charity which donates about \$5 million each year to local and national charities, much of which is used to support veterans in need.

Our veterans and fraternal organizations fill in the gaps to help our local communities with needs that would otherwise go unmet.

HB 282 would also increase accountability. All gaming conducted on electronic devices would be tracked on a central system by the Attorney General. Vendors would be licensed by the Attorney General and systems would be tested by an accredited laboratory. This will decrease the potential for fraud and error and ensure financial integrity.

The Ohio Casino Control Commission has offered to allow charitable organizations to utilize its problem gambling helpline and we are open to implementing.

We are pleased that Attorney General David Yost strongly supports HB 282 because he realizes the positive impact our organizations have. He also realizes that modernization is long overdue, and that electronic gaming would provide more accountability.

HB 282 is about modernization, accountability, transparency, positive community impact, and helping veterans.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of this important legislation.