



December 9, 2020
Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
Interested Party HB 282

Chair Coley, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee thank you for allowing me to provide interested party testimony on HB 282. I am Kelly Smith, the State Program and Policy Director for the Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition (MHAC). The MHAC is a statewide member organization actively advocating to increase awareness and advance policies to improve the lives of those impacted by mental illnesses and addiction disorders. The MHAC's membership includes approximately 120 organizations whose members exemplify the diversity of community organizations that have a common interest in behavioral health, including health and human service organizations; the faith-based community; government entities; advocacy organizations; courts; major medical institutions; the corporate arena; and behavioral health agencies serving adults and children.

The MHAC has not taken a position on gambling but strongly supports consumer protections to be firmly in place to ensure responsible gambling in the state of Ohio. Through more education and awareness, it is the MHAC's hope that policymakers will always consider consumer protection policies simultaneously with gambling bills as they work together to create a model of safe gambling.

Simple yet important provisions will safeguard Ohioans while gambling. Please include the following as amendments into the legislation before passage,

- Requiring the Ohio Problem Gambling Helpline in visible locations,
- Dedicating funding from licensures to support gambling treatment and prevention services, and
- Requiring training for gambling operators.

Required Inclusion of the Ohio Problem Gambling Helpline

The Ohio Problem Gambling Helpline 1-800-589-9966 and GamblingHelpOhio.org must have a strong presence in each instant electronic bingo location by having information posted throughout on each instant electronic bingo terminal, on all promotional advertising, as well as on each bingo license. The Ohio Problem Gambling Helpline, operated by the United Way 2-1-1 of Greater Cleveland, is often the first step toward help and hope for individuals struggling with a gambling problem. Since instant electronic bingo devices are essentially slot machines, we expect problem gambling rates to align with other electronic gaming machines, like slot machines and video lottery terminals. As such, we believe an increase in calls to the helpline will result of instant electronic bingo in Ohio.

Dedicated Funds Dedicated to Gambling Support Services

With the anticipated increases in problem and disordered gambling that will result from this legislation, it is critical to have resources available to provide support. PGNO requests this legislation include a provision to direct a portion of each licensing fee to a fund for problem gambling support services. Unlike substance use and mental health issues, no federal funds are available to support those impacted by gambling. Problems that result due to expansion must be paid for with funds generated from expansion.

Required Training for all Operators

There is currently no infrastructure to ensure that those operating charitable gaming, whether paid or volunteer, are consistently trained to respond to those experiencing a gambling problem. Ohio's four casinos and seven racinos have focused on monitoring responsible gambling through staff training, surveillance, compliance, and the statewide Voluntary Exclusion Program. We know that with consistent and regular training, staff can identify those with gambling problems and ensure that the individual is aware of available resources, such as the Ohio Problem Gambling Helpline. PGNO requests the inclusion of a requirement for all instant electronic bingo operators to participate in a gambling orientation training, as well as an annual refresher training.

Any gambling legislation that expands the gaming industry must also coincide with certain consumer protections. As gambling continues to grow, so too must protections to prevent and treat any gambling addictions that may arise. These recommendations will allow Ohio to create a safe gambling environment for everyone to enjoy.

Please reach out with any questions or for additional information.

Sincerely,
Kelly Smith
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