

Testimony of Merle Pratt, Ohio Veterans and Fraternal Charitable Coalition
In support of Substitute Senate Bill 176
Ohio Senate Select Committee on Gaming
May 19, 2021

Members of the Senate Select Committee on Gaming:

My name is Merle Pratt and I am the former state commander of AMVETS Department of Ohio and the current Secretary of the Ohio Veterans and Fraternal Charitable Coalition.

Thank you for your dedication to helping veterans and fraternal organizations in our effort to finalize an electronic form of charitable gaming. As you know, we've been working on this initiative since 2011, so it is quite encouraging to see such great progress with this legislation.

This bill is vital to the operation of our posts and lodges, and even more important for us to be able to continue to support our much needed charitable missions within our communities.

After reviewing the language in Substitute Senate Bill 176, we do have several issues we would ask that you address to make the bill more practical and workable as we begin the regulatory phase.

1. We respectfully ask that Section 2915.14 be amended to remove the language referencing the litigation filed by the Ohio Veterans and Fraternal Charitable Coalition regarding the legality of electronic charitable gaming in Ohio. This longstanding litigation remains unresolved, and it does not make practical sense to reference a pending lawsuit in the permanent code.
2. We propose that the language referencing the court case is unnecessary, as the bill already contains a new two-step certification process to ensure that all electronic charitable gaming systems are legally compliant. This process requires both a review by the Ohio Attorney General's office and a subsequent review by the Casino Control Commission. We ask that the Senate consider clarifying the language to establish clear timelines for the review process. We propose that each enforcement agency have 30 days to act on the compliance question prior to certification, but we respect that these agencies might recommend a different timeline. We would simply ask that the language (or timeline for review) not be left open-ended.
3. Finally, our third and final recommendation is to reconcile the conflicting sections of the bill dealing with the definition of a slot machine. Section 2915.01 of the bill currently contains one definition of a "slot machine," and Section 3772.01 contains a conflicting definition. Without the amended language, the bill's ultimate intent and purpose would be undermined and subjected to further legal uncertainty. As written, Section 3772.01 could be construed to mean that every electronic instant bingo system is a "slot machine." This issue can be easily resolved by reconciling the two conflicting definitions of a "slot machine" currently referenced in the bill. We have submitted the proposed language changes to the committee.

Once again, thank you for your dedication to helping veterans and fraternal and their charitable mission. I'd be happy to answer any questions.