

**Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association**

Interested Party Testimony

Ohio House Bill 33

March 21, 2023

Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Troy, and esteemed members of the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources Committee - My name is Renée Mancino. I am submitting this written testimony as the Executive Director of the Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association (OHHA) on behalf of its over 3,700 members across Ohio.

Established in 1953, The Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association is the only non-profit association serving Ohio's Standardbred horse owners, breeders, trainers, drivers, and fans who participate in the sport of harness racing in the Buckeye State. The mission of the Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association is to preserve, protect, promote, and serve the entire Standardbred industry in Ohio and beyond.

The Ohio harness horsemen's industry is integral to Ohio's economy and cultural heritage. It supports thousands of jobs across the state and generates millions of dollars in revenue each year. We partner with numerous organizations and state agencies, including the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Ohio State Racing Commission, our racetrack partners, and the Ohio Farm Bureau, to promote and support public awareness and continued growth of "Ohio's first sport." This also includes racing at 66 Ohio county fairs and providing financial support to all Ohio county fairs.

As this committee deliberates Governor DeWine's executive budget proposal, House Bill 33, the Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association respectfully requests the following three amendments be included in the House-passed version of the budget to further support and sustain this critical Ohio industry within the broader agricultural sector.

**Request: *Require the Joint Committee on Sports Gaming, created under H.B. 29 of the 134<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, to study the economic impact of sports gaming on Ohio's horse racing industry and the potential impact of permitting sports gaming proprietors to accept wagers on horse racing.***

Ohio horsemen are small business operators supporting agriculture statewide. The adverse effects on Ohio racing from the gaming expansion in 2009 resulted from the Lottery Agent's geographic relocation of settled racetracks, increased marketplace competition, and increased promotion of the new gaming and entertainment environment.

Since 2009 Ohio Casino and Racino gaming revenue has continued to increase while generating an increase in live horse racing wagering has been a consistent struggle during the same period due to competition from the gaming expansion. Preliminary data from Ohio's horse racing industry in 2018 reflects a direct impact of over 21,000 jobs and an economic impact that exceeds \$2.8 billion with \$900 million in personal income for Ohioans. With this in mind, we request that

this committee include language directing the Joint Committee on Sports Gaming to study the economic impact of sports gaming expansion on Ohio's horse racing industry and the potential impact of permitting sports gaming proprietors to accept wagers on horse racing in the state.

***Request: Require Online and Mobile sports wagering operators to offer horse racing alongside other offerings if the operator provides any out-of-state horse racing events within a particular calendar year.***

Given the authorized expansion of online and mobile wagering on sports established under H.B. 29 of the 134<sup>th</sup> Ohio General Assembly, the OHHA requests that sports gaming proprietors be required to offer Ohio-based horse racing alongside any other sports wagering offerings if the proprietor offers wagering on any out-of-state horse racing event within that calendar year to ensure parity and continuity in the sports wagering industry.

While gaming expansion implementation has put a spotlight on Ohio in recent months, parity in wagering options through integration is critical to maintaining the strong standardbred industry across the state. To that end, OHHA requests language allowing sports gaming proprietors to accept wagers on horse racing other than pari-mutuel wagers on horse races regulated by the State Racing Commission, with program approval through the Ohio Casino Control Commission. Furthermore, we believe it is imperative for Ohio's horsemen industry to require a sports gaming proprietor that offers wagering on horse racing conducted outside Ohio during a calendar year to also offer wagering on horse racing in Ohio at all times it is conducted during that year.

***Request: Utilize Ohio travel & tourism funding through the Ohio Department of Development for an investment of \$250,000 in the Little Brown Jug purse prize to encourage maximum participation and marketing of the event.***

The OHHA would also like to respectfully request consideration from this committee for including funding of \$250,000 through the Department of Development to increase the Little Brown Jug (LBJ) purse to \$1,000,000. The Little Brown Jug harness race, held in Delaware County, Ohio, continues to be an iconic event and a staple of the harness racing world for over 70 years.

The Little Brown Jug is not just a race; it is a celebration of the sport of harness racing and a showcase for some of the best horses and drivers in the world. The LBJ is North America's single-largest attended standardbred horse race – drawing on-site attending from 41,000-47,000. The Jug is also a significant contributor to the local economy. Each year, thousands of fans from across the country flock to Delaware County to witness the excitement and thrill of this historic event.

In addition to the economic benefits, the Little Brown Jug also has meaningful cultural and historical significance. It is a reminder of the rich heritage of harness racing in the United States and serves as a beacon for future generations of fans and participants.

Currently, the LBJ purse is funded via various sources, including nomination and sustaining payments, the Delaware County Fair, sponsorships, and the Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association. State assistance bringing the purse to \$1,000,000 would provide a critical infusion to the "Greatest Show on Dirt." Marketing of the purse would draw an even larger attendance to the state and Delaware County community, ensure the highest-quality horses participate, increase wagering and focus on Ohio's proud history of being the best state for harness racing.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical matter. The OHHA would greatly appreciate your willingness to consider the abovementioned amendments to Ohio House Bill 33. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 614-221-3650 or via e-mail at [rmancino@ohha.com](mailto:rmancino@ohha.com).

Sincerely,

Renée Mancino  
Executive Director  
Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association