

**Testimony of Brandt Iden – VP, Government Affairs Fanatics Betting & Gaming
Support – HB 298
May 27, 2025**

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, and Ranking Member Sweeney, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of HB 298. My name is Brandt Iden, and I am the Vice President of Government Affairs for Fanatics Betting and Gaming (FBG).

Please let me start by saying thank you! On any given day in Ohio, there are thousands of people across the state playing online casino games for money. iCasino games are readily available in the form of illegal offshore casino websites and unregulated “sweepstakes” casinos. The difference is, these casinos have no oversight, no consumer protections, and generate zero revenue for the state. Today, by thoughtfully deliberating the issue of online casino gaming, you’re taking the first steps towards protecting your residents. That said, I believe there are improvements that can be made to the legislation which will reflect Ohio’s best interests and the interests of those who invest in Ohio.

However, before I turn to Fanatics and the bill before you today, I’d like to briefly mention my background in that state to the north, which shall not be named. In my previous life, I served in the MI legislature as the Chair of the W&M cte and shepherded the 2019 iCasino legislation. I am proud to say that not only have revenues been 10 times what was forecasted by the state’s fiscal agency, MI is the second largest market in the country to only that of Pennsylvania. In fact, it’s so big that it accounts for 95.5% of lifetime online gambling taxes in the state. To put that in perspective, MI has generated over \$2B total in lifetime online gambling taxes, of that over \$1.7B has come from iCasino & 15 operators. These are real dollars, which have made an incredible difference in supporting education, local government – like the City of Detroit, local tribal governments, first responders and the state’s horse racing industry.

What’s more, despite what you may have heard, MI and other states have demonstrated that online casinos support existing retail casinos by bringing in new revenue. Studies show that states which offer online casino gaming have, on average, realized a 2% annual increase in land-based gaming revenue. In fact, and I promise it’s the last time I will mention MI. The 3 commercial casinos in the City of Detroit had their best year for annual revenue in five years in 2024. The last time they made more money in a year was 2019, not coincidentally, the year before disruptions cause by COVID.

Turning now to Fanatics, Inc. of which FBG is a subsidiary. I would again like to say thank you! Fanatics is the global leader in licensed sports merchandise and thanks to the excellent work of the legislature, we’re happy to call OH home. Ohio has been an integral to our operations for over a decade. We are heavily invested in the success of the state, your local communities, and Ohioans. We opened our Frazesburg distribution center in 2013, and it

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continues to be one of our largest employment locations in the United States. We are a top five employer in Muskingum County, currently employing over 300 team members full-time, over 1,000 in our busy seasonal times and remit over \$8.5 million a year in state and local taxes. Additionally, we own the Lids clothing retail outlets throughout the state and the Buckeye Corner franchise encompassing nearly all things related to Ohio State.

I think it's also important to note that our unique sports betting presence within the state further amplifies our commitment to OH. We are proudly partnered with the Columbus Blue Jackets, operating a year-round retail sports book in the Arena District directly across the sidewalk from Nationwide Arena. Which I believe is the only retail sports book operating outside of a casino or racino in the entire state.

All this to say, that even though we may not be headquartered here, like other gaming operators who have testified before you, that does not mean we view Ohio merely as a market in which we can extract money and simply send it somewhere else. Our investments in Ohio speak for themselves, we value our long-term partnership with the state, and we take pride in the employment opportunities we offer to Ohioans.

As such, we believe there is room for improvement within the legislation to not only help support companies like FBG, but all new market entrants. Specifically, addressing the number of gaming operators who can compete within the state. Limiting the market to only seven operators will not provide enough options for consumers to adequately transition from the illegal market, further stifling growth and depressing tax revenues. Additionally, overburdening operators with excessive licensing fees would likely limit market growth and again, depress tax revenues. While FBG today represents a relatively small percentage of the iCasino markets in the 4 states in which we operate, our market share continues to grow month over month and limiting our growth potential only jeopardizes the millions of new dollars which could be realized by the state.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and would welcome any questions.