

## Opposition Testimony: H.B. No. 298

Before the Finance Committee of the Ohio House of Representatives

Tuesday, June 3, 2025

Presented by

Aaron Womack, UNITE HERE Local 24

Thank you, Chairman Stewart for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Aaron Womack, and I am here today to represent my union, UNITE HERE Local 24. We oppose the legalization of internet gaming currently proposed in HB 298. **This policy will cause good, union jobs to be lost and will harm Ohio casino workers and their families.**

UNITE HERE is the largest union of casino workers in the US, representing over 100,000 members who work in casinos in Las Vegas, Atlantic City, and throughout the country. In Ohio, we represent workers at JACK Cleveland, JACK Thistledown, MGM Northfield Park, and Hard Rock Cincinnati.

Our members work in food and beverage, cleaning, and service jobs in casinos. They work as housekeepers, servers, bartenders, cooks, dishwashers and more. These positions make up most of the union jobs in the industry and are completely dependent on in-person customers. Our members' jobs will be at risk if internet gaming is legalized.

In February 2025, the Innovation Group published a study that analyzed gaming revenues in both iGaming and non-iGaming states. The study concluded that "iGaming steals revenue from existing gaming operations."<sup>i</sup> The analysis found that brick-and-mortar casino revenue underperforms by approximately 16% in states where iGaming has been legalized. The report projected that **if Ohio legalizes iGaming, the impact on the state could be a loss of 2,818 jobs and a labor income loss of \$203.9 million.**<sup>ii</sup>

Our members have seen severe job losses in iGaming states.

In Atlantic City, our union represents food and beverage and hotel workers at all nine casinos. From 2019 to 2024, **iGaming revenue grew from \$483 million annually to over \$2.3 billion, a 395% increase. In the same period, total employment fell from 29,298 to 24,232, which was a loss of over 5,000 jobs, a 17% decline,** according to the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement.<sup>iii</sup>

In Detroit, we have seen even more severe job losses. In 2019, our union represented 2,796 members working in hotel and food and beverage jobs at all three casinos. In 2021, internet gaming launched in Michigan. Today, we have 1,768 members at the same casinos – **a loss of 1,028 union jobs in Detroit, a 38% decline.**

The Innovation Group Study estimated that without iGaming, brick-and-mortar casinos would have brought in additional revenues of \$374 million in New Jersey and \$787 million in Michigan in 2024.<sup>iv</sup> That additional in-person spending could have supported casino jobs.

Ohio's casinos directly employ 6,531 people<sup>v</sup> and create an annual economic impact of \$7.28 billion which supports over 33,000 jobs in the state.<sup>vi</sup> In-person gaming drives local economic activity within and around the casinos. Replacing in-person spending with online spending will not only threaten the jobs of members of our union, but it could also cause broader job loss through secondary impacts on businesses including surrounding hotels and restaurants and casino vendors.

Through collective bargaining, Ohio casino workers have achieved life-changing standards of wages and benefits. Union jobs uplift families and communities and allow working Ohioans to buy homes, access affordable health care, and retire with dignity. Only 13% of workers in Ohio are represented by a union.<sup>vii</sup> Lawmakers should be protecting these jobs, not putting them at risk.

We ask that you please stand with us to protect jobs in Ohio. We ask that you oppose the legalization of internet gaming.

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<sup>i</sup> The Innovation Group, "Economic Impacts of iGaming Expansion," February 2025, retrieved from: <https://naaig.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/NAAiG-iGaming-Impact-Report-.pdf>, see p. 7

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iii</sup> In 2019, peak employment was 29,298 in June. In 2024, peak employment was 24,232 in July. New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement, Casino Hotel Employment Figures, retrieved from: <https://www.njoag.gov/about/divisions-and-offices/division-of-gaming-enforcement-home/employee-licensing-reports/>

<sup>iv</sup> The Innovation Group, "Economic Impacts of iGaming Expansion," February 2025, retrieved from: <https://naaig.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/NAAiG-iGaming-Impact-Report-.pdf>, see p. 21

<sup>v</sup> US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, NAICS 713210 Casinos September 2024 Employment, retrieved from: <https://data.bls.gov/>

<sup>vi</sup> American Gaming Association, "Gaming by the Numbers: Ohio," December 31, 2024, retrieved from: [https://www.americangaming.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Ohio\\_Economic.pdf](https://www.americangaming.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Ohio_Economic.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> US Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Union Members in Ohio – 2024," February 19, 2025, retrieved from: [https://www.bls.gov/regions/midwest/news-release/unionmembership\\_ohio.htm](https://www.bls.gov/regions/midwest/news-release/unionmembership_ohio.htm)