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agriculture and strengthen our communities.*

**House Finance Committee
HB 298 Interested Party Testimony
Evan Callicoat, Director of State Policy
June 3rd, 2025**

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and other honorable members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on House Bill 298 (SB298). The position of OFBF and my comments today focus on the elements of HB 298 as it relates to horse racing in Ohio. OFBF has long supported the equine industry as an essential partner in making agriculture Ohio's number one industry.

The entire horse racing industry has an annual economic impact of \$2.7 billion and supports 23,000 jobs statewide. In addition to racing at racinos and similar venues, races at county fairs remain popular and crucial ways of introducing the general public to the sport. OFBF is concerned about the impact of legalizing iGaming on Ohio's horse racing industry. While OFBF is not necessarily opposed to iGaming as a concept, any attempt to legalize it must ensure the viability of our brick-and-mortar establishments and should propel horse racing in Ohio, not stifle it. We would respectfully ask the committee to consider the following as this legislation moves forward to protect horse racing in Ohio.

Preserve the State Racing Commission: We ask the committee to preserve the State Racing Commission (RAC) in any legislation legalizing iGaming. The RAC provides integral oversight and expertise to ensure the success of our racing industry and the safety and well-being of animals, employees, and racegoers. Especially when it comes to caring for the animals involved, having a dedicated commission that understands the industry would best serve horse racing and its patrons. The RAC has not only served as a responsible regulator, but they have also gone above and beyond to promote the horse racing and breeding industry in Ohio, and we would again urge the Committee in their deliberations with the Senate to allow the RAC to continue that great work that it has done in our state.

Preserving Brick and Mortar Industry: Should the General Assembly legalize iGaming, it must also ensure that funding agreements continue to benefit the horse racing industry in Ohio as the current structure does. As our society continues to rely on our mobile devices more and more, we understand the interest in expanding gaming to this medium, but not at the expense of the brick-and-mortar establishments that make our horse racing industry one of the best in the country. Any legislation that legalizes iGaming must not put current operators at a competitive disadvantage and prioritize the protection of the horse racing industry. This could be accomplished through a percentage cut of revenue, similar to agreements already in place between horsemen and the racinos. Any decrease in revenues derived from VLTs could also negatively impact the racing that takes place at Ohio's county fairs, which is one of the most



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extensive county fair racing programs in the country. Harness racing provides a significant draw to Ohio's county fairs, generating revenue for our fairs that are often the heart of our local agricultural communities. Revenue from VLTs supports all Ohio fairs (whether they have racing or not) through capital improvement grants to support their efforts. OFBF appreciates the committee's time today, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.