



**Opponent Testimony HB 298
House Finance Committee
Catholic Conference of Ohio
June 3, 2025**

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony today. My name is Brian Hickey, and I am the Executive Director of the Catholic Conference of Ohio. The Catholic Conference is the official voice of the Catholic Church in Ohio on matters of public policy, and we are opposed to House Bill 298 to legalize internet gambling.

While the Catholic Church teaches that certain games of chance are not intrinsically evil, our faith warns that gambling becomes morally unacceptable and socially dangerous when it deprives individuals “of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others” and when the passion for gambling becomes enslavement. HB 298 would facilitate an unprecedented scope and capacity for enslavement to gambling by legalizing round-the-clock access to highly addictive platforms from any bedroom, dorm room, or workplace in Ohio. We recognize the bill’s intended protections against certain exploitations, but they do not compare to the costs that legalized internet gambling will incur to the common good and families.

Problem gambling is not merely an issue of personal financial management. According to the Ohio Casino Control Commission, four out of five individuals struggling with gambling addiction consider suicide, and one out of five attempt it. Such suffering is not abstract; it’s already happening in our own families and neighborhoods. HB 298 will exacerbate the negative impacts of gaming by expanding its reach to any person in Ohio with a phone or tablet. These persons could include young men already allured by sports gambling, those living on fixed incomes, and those who have already overcome an addiction to gambling by maintaining a strict distance between themselves and the physical establishments where we prudently limit gaming activity.

It deserves to be said that the harmful effects of gambling disproportionately impact the poor, young men, and the lonely. In 2024, Ohioans lost \$4.73 billion to commercialized gambling. This sum represents an enormous wealth transfer from the least of these to exploitative entities offering in return only more despair and compulsion.

Building a state budget on the losses and misery of our neighbors through versions of gambling on personal devices makes us all complicit in the despondency that awaits the young and old alike at the end of their virtual run. We encourage a stronger will to find revenue, if needed, from more traditional sources rather than those who could soon be caught in this virtual trap.



On their own, we already know the addictions to phones and tablets and gambling. We should encourage the flourishing of our social institutions rather than allowing a pathway for more Ohioans to engage in this vice. For the sake of the common good and especially those most vulnerable to gambling addiction, the Catholic Conference of Ohio urges you to reject this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.