



CINCINNATI



June 3, 2025

**SUBMITTED TESTIMONY TO THE OHIO HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
BY JASON TOSCHES, SENIOR DIRECTOR - GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS  
FOR HARD ROCK DIGITAL**

Good afternoon, Chair Stewart and members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Jason Tosches, and I am the Senior Director - Government Affairs for Hard Rock Digital. I, alongside the Hard Rock Casino Cincinnati, appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony to this committee as part of the ongoing dialogue regarding online casino gaming (iCasino). Together, we believe it is an important opportunity to modernize casino gaming in Ohio, but, respectfully, we firmly contend that a regulatory framework must recognize the casino gaming provisions in the Ohio Constitution and the significant partnership that we have with the state.

Hard Rock Digital is the exclusive Hard Rock International vehicle for iCasino and sports betting and the primary vendor to the Seminole Tribe of Florida for sports betting. Known worldwide for its famous cafes, casinos, hotels, and music memorabilia collection, Hard Rock's legendary hospitality and entertainment serves as our foundation to enhance the customer experience.

As you are aware, voters approved an amendment to the Ohio Constitution in November 2009 to authorize one casino facility within Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, and Toledo. Video lottery terminals were authorized at the state's seven racetracks two years later through a gubernatorial executive order. Importantly, "casino gaming" is defined in the Ohio Constitution as "*any* type of slot machine or table game wagering," and is limited to the four casino facilities. The Ohio Constitution also defines "slot machines" and "table game" similarly. Therefore, we believe the only path to authorizing iCasino in Ohio is through the state's four casinos.

In 2019, Hard Rock International expanded its global gaming portfolio by investing nearly \$200 million to acquire and operate the Cincinnati casino facility. The new Hard Rock Casino Cincinnati opened shortly thereafter and began a \$140 million renovation and rebranding to create a best-in-class integrated resort experience - with additional investment since and to come. Today, the property features roughly 1,600 slot machines, more than 100 table games, Council Oak Steaks & Seafood, Hard Rock Cafe, an outdoor concert venue, and more.

Not only did Hard Rock International welcome approximately 950 team members into the company at the time of acquisition, but the property has created hundreds of new jobs since - bringing current employment to 1,300 team members. Over the last five years, Hard Rock

Casino Cincinnati has paid out hundreds of millions in wages and benefits, supported direct and indirect economic activity, and has continually given back to the community with more than 1,500 volunteer hours, hundreds of thousands in donations to charities, and partnerships with 40 local organizations.

iCasino presents an opportunity for the four casino facilities to complement, strengthen, and make further investments in their land-based offering through omnichannel opportunities. In New Jersey, where we and Hard Rock International operate iCasino and Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City, a very large percentage of our digital customers had no rated play at our property prior to account creation. For the most part, it is a different customer. We have integrated Unity, Hard Rock's premier loyalty program, into our online casino and sportsbook, creating a win-win scenario where guests enjoy an enriched experience, and we foster an introduction to all the amazing in-person amenities in our brand. We expect to bring new customers to Hard Rock Casino Cincinnati.

Conversely, and setting aside the limitations in the Ohio Constitution for a moment, digital-only operators have not made nearly the same investment as we have in the state of Ohio and should not be permitted to enter the casino gaming market with iCasino. Without a land-based presence, no meaningful investment or jobs in the state, and presumably operating under a sports betting-first brand (i.e., not under the same brand as a casino), it makes their marketing of a digital customer to a retail partner confusing and unlikely to be prioritized or effective.

The more likely scenario, however, is casino facilities will be at risk of a diminished opportunity to evolve our business if digital-only operators are given the same iCasino opportunities but skipped over billions of dollars in combined investment, thousands of Ohioans employed, and hundreds of millions in annual tax revenue. It would be the equivalent of being born on third base. This can be avoided by the legislature recognizing the Ohio Constitution and casino gaming investment, employment, and positive community and economic impact.

Under the right regulatory framework, we believe iCasino can generate a large amount of untapped revenue *and* ensure that the market is incremental to land-based casino gaming. We have estimated hundreds of millions in annual tax revenue to the State at market maturity. A limited number of operators overseen by the Ohio Casino Control Commission can deliver this important policy objective.

Equally as important, a regulated iCasino market enhances responsible gaming, ensures wagering can be enjoyed as a form of entertainment, and protects Ohioans of all ages that may currently be participating with unregulated operators. We offer our customers deposit, wager, and session limits, cooling off periods, self-exclusion, and reality checks as frequently as every five minutes. And we follow established intervention thresholds based on observed account activity and/or player behavior.

Additionally, we're a member of the Responsible Online Gaming Association, which was established to support independent research, share best practices, and drive customer education and awareness. Responsible gaming is a strong commitment of ours.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our position on iCasino and for the work of this committee to evaluate this issue. We're happy to be a resource anytime and look forward to detailed conversations with you on our proposed solution as the process moves ahead.

Regards,

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