



**Proponent Testimony of Andrew W. Herf  
Executive Director, Ohio Bar Owners Association  
on HB 344  
before the Ohio House Finance Committee  
June 17, 2025**

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the Ohio House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Andrew Herf and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Bar Owners Association. I am here today as a proponent of House Bill 344.

In particular, I am here to support provisions in the bill that would allow for video lottery terminals to be placed in bars and other establishments across Ohio.

We believe placing video lottery terminals, or VLTs, in bars is both a responsible approach to expanded gaming in Ohio and provides the most revenue for the state through the Ohio Lottery. VLTs in bars also provide revenue for small business owners who exist in every district in Ohio. In addition to supporting small businesses across the state, HB 344 creates the safest and least invasive form of gaming in Ohio. Machines would be placed in the view of bartenders who are trained to serve people over the age of 21. That responsibility would extend to the machines, just as it would for anyone ordering a drink. In the event that people under 21 are allowed in the establishment, the machines would be placed in an area that prevent access to people under 21. The bill also requires that cameras be placed to watch the machines, which ensures an additional level of security to protect both customers and businesses. We feel confident that our owners and their staff, including their bartenders and wait staff, are already trained to card and sell products in their spaces responsibly.

After businesses across Ohio were forced to close for nearly 2,000 hours during the pandemic, we have worked to seek more opportunities to make that revenue back. A

couple of years ago, the legislature granted bar owners the ability to offer a sports gaming product to their customers. Unfortunately, that product has not been able to compete against the games that are offered on individual cell phones in the form of apps. We believe VLTs are a different enough product that they will be profitable for bar owners. The play is faster than waiting on the outcome of a single sporting event, but the play would also be limited to small dollar bets, and they are further limited by the fact that only one person can play on a machine at a time. Furthermore, no one can play on a device when bars close, which happens statutorily every night at 2:30 in the morning.

We believe that the controls outlined in HB 344 and the ongoing server training in bars makes VLTs in bars a responsible option for Ohioans.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions.