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Before the House Finance Committee

Representative Brian Stewart, Chair

H.B. 344 Proponent Testimony of Steven N. Berk, MPH
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Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the Committee; good morning and thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 344.

My name is Steven Berk, and I am here on behalf of Giant Eagle, Inc., a leading regional grocery retailer proudly doing business across the State of Ohio. With more than 90 supermarkets and thousands of team members across the state, Giant Eagle has long been committed to serving Ohio communities not only as a food retailer, but also as a responsible partner in public programs, including the Ohio Lottery. We are also proud members of the Ohio Council of Retail Merchants and the Ohio Grocers Association.

For years, Giant Eagle has offered traditional lottery in our stores with a strong track record of integrity, compliance, and customer trust. We've seen firsthand the value lottery products bring—not only to customers, but to the state's education funding and broader public benefit. House Bill 344 presents a timely and well-structured opportunity to modernize Ohio's gaming landscape by authorizing retailer-based video lottery terminals (VLTs) under the oversight of the Ohio Lottery Commission. Giant Eagle is proud to support this legislation because it builds upon existing, successful models while upholding the high standards the public expects from regulated gaming.

We have direct experience operating terminals in select locations and can speak confidently to our ability to manage them in a secure and responsible manner. Our stores already implement strict age-verification protocols for age-restricted products, and those same systems and training programs would be applied to any future VLT offerings. Our team members are well-trained in identifying and preventing underage access, and we continuously monitor compliance to ensure safe and legal operations. What's more, the availability of VLTs in controlled retail environments offers customers a convenient and community-based alternative to other forms of gaming, all while creating new economic opportunities for retailers and new revenue for the state.

Other states—like Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Georgia—have successfully introduced retail-based VLTs, generating significant revenue for public priorities while preserving a strong and diversified gaming ecosystem. These examples demonstrate that the expansion of VLTs in retail does not detract from casinos or racinos, but instead offers Ohioans additional regulated choices within a responsible framework.

We applaud Representatives Dovilla and Manning for their thoughtful sponsorship of this legislation and for recognizing the role trusted retailers like Giant Eagle can play in supporting Ohio's lottery and gaming modernization efforts.

Thank you, Chair Stewart, and the members of the Committee, for your time and for considering this important legislation. We urge your support of House Bill 344 and stand ready to be a partner in its responsible implementation.

Respectfully Submitted,

Steven N. Berk, MPH

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