



June 17, 2025

The Honorable Brian Stewart
Chair, House Finance Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
77 S. High Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Chairman Stewart:

On behalf of the Ohio Energy & Convenience Association (OECA) and our statewide network of reputable convenience retailers, thank you for the opportunity to provide written proponent testimony on House Bill 344. The OECA represents all segments of the fuel and convenience supply chain and are a proud affiliate of the Ohio Council of Retail Merchants.

Our members have partnered with the Ohio Lottery for over forty years—providing safe, secure, and reliable access to traditional lottery products in neighborhoods and communities across the state. This long-standing public-private partnership has played a vital role in funding Ohio’s education system, and our members take that responsibility seriously.

Retail lottery is a cornerstone of the convenience store business model. Lottery products draw consistent foot traffic and generate additional sales—helping small, medium, and even large retailers remain competitive and sustain jobs. More importantly, OECA members have a proven track record of responsibly managing age-restricted products, including lottery and gaming, tobacco, and alcohol. We are confident this same level of care and compliance will be upheld in any future deployment of video lottery terminals (VLTs) in retail establishments. House Bill 344 represents an important opportunity for Ohio to modernize its gaming infrastructure, expand access to regulated VLTs in more retail locations, and increase funding for education and other state priorities. By authorizing regulated VLTs in qualified retail settings, Ohio can responsibly broaden the gaming marketplace in a way that complements—not competes with—existing gaming options. This is not uncharted territory. States like Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Georgia have already adopted similar models with significant success. In Illinois, for example, the addition of VLTs in convenience stores and other licensed locations has generated hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue while boosting small business profitability. These programs are tightly regulated, and participation is limited to responsible operators who meet strict compliance standards—similar to the safeguards outlined in H.B. 344.

Despite some claims to the contrary, the presence of VLTs in retail settings has not eroded other gaming revenues in these states. Instead, it has expanded the overall market by offering players greater convenience, while preserving consumer choice and generating new revenue streams that directly benefit local governments and the state as a whole.

In closing, we sincerely thank Representatives Dovilla and Manning for introducing this legislation and for recognizing the valuable role Ohio’s retailers can play in advancing a secure, regulated, and modernized gaming environment. We urge this committee to support House Bill 344 and allow Ohio’s long-standing lottery partners to help strengthen the state’s future. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact us with any questions

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex Boehnke". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Alex Boehnke
Executive Director
Ohio Energy & Convenience Association (OECA)