



Senate Select Committee on Gaming  
SB 197 Opponent Testimony  
May 28, 2025 - 2:30 p.m.

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Romanchuk, Ranking Member DeMora, and members of the Senate Select Committee on Gaming, thank you for the opportunity to testify as an opponent of Senate Bill 197 which would legalize internet gambling in the State of Ohio.

My name is Tony Coder and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation, a non-profit focused on breaking stigma around suicide, but also providing strategies for communities, individuals and families to improve opportunities for mental health wellness.

Suicide is a public health issue that impacts Ohio with, on average, five Ohioans dying by suicide every day in our State. In addition, nearly 30 people come into our emergency rooms for a suicide attempt every day.

Over 80% of Ohio's suicides are men, and the highest number of suicides among males were ages 25-34. .

One of the things that we struggle with as a State and OSPF as an organization are the causes of suicide. There is no one cause of suicide, but we do have characteristics or points of concern that help us recognize when a person might be considering suicide and this can help us to get to that person.

When we think of suicide, we tend to automatically consider the mental health aspects, which is a definite driver when we look at suicides as a whole. However, there are other pieces that we need to consider when looking at suicide and how we can help stop individuals from taking their lives and families going through the unfathomable grief that accompanies every suicide.

Research shows that increased rates of job loss, financial distress/poverty, and housing loss during economic recessions were associated with increases in suicide attempts and suicide among working-age adults, particularly middle-aged White males in the U.S.

A study of individuals who died by suicide from 2005–2010, reported that foreclosure-related suicides increased more than 250% during the study period. Most suicides occurred before the actual housing loss, suggesting that there is a window of opportunity to prevent suicide during often-protracted foreclosure/eviction procedures.

We also know that problem gambling is tied to suicides. In fact, studies show that problem gamblers have the highest rate of suicide of any addiction disorder. With over 220,000 individuals in Ohio engaging in at-risk behavior for gambling and 30,000 individuals who engage in problem-gambling behavior, according to a 2017 report, we are truly concerned that suicide numbers will increase if this legislation passes as it is written.

Our casinos, racinos, and gaming establishments have put in protections for individuals who are either problem gamblers or have exhibited behaviors that are concerning for representatives at gaming establishments. According to OAC Rule 3772-12-06, protections lie upon the gaming establishments to prevent patrons impaired by drugs or alcohol, or both, from gambling. With this proposal, these protections cannot exist as the bill is designed to allow gambling to take place in isolation.

Suicide can also be a decision that can be made very quickly. A study by Keith Hawton, a renowned suicide researcher from Oxford in the UK, asked the question of suicide attempt survivors, “how much time passed between the time you decided to complete suicide and when you actually attempted suicide?” and 1 in 4 of those suicide attempt survivors said that the time was less than five minutes and nearly 70% said it was less than an hour.

As I think about individuals who are gambling online, alone, suicide is primarily an act that is done privately. When one is gambling online, I also think about someone sitting alone with only their phone, and making a decision that is final because the safeguards that are available at physical gaming establishments aren’t there for those who are struggling or impacted by problem gambling.

I am grateful for the opportunity to testify about this piece of legislation. Although we mostly hear about the taxes and fees that will be raised by this proposal, I am hopeful we will think of the folks that I either deal with currently or who are going to be impacted by suicide and understand the costs to humanity could be much more than any taxes collected.

I am happy to answer any questions that you might have.