

**Testimony of Cameron Scholvin on behalf of the  
Columbus Blue Jackets  
Before the Ohio Senate Select Committee on Gaming  
March 17, 2021**

Good Afternoon Chairman Schuring and members of the committee. My name is Cameron Scholvin and I am the Chief Operating Officer for the Columbus Blue Jackets. I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on the proposition of legalized sports betting in Ohio.

First, I'd like to speak a bit about the Columbus Blue Jackets. The McConnell family had a vision of bringing professional sports to Columbus and were awarded the rights to a National Hockey League franchise in November of 1996. The following May, a referendum for a publicly funded arena failed, but instead of ending the city's hopes of attracting an NHL team, Mr. McConnell met with leaders at Nationwide and a partnership was formed that resulted in a state-of-the-art arena opening in September 2000 and a transformation of downtown Columbus that continues today. This year's unprecedented season of no fans and limited fans marks the team's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season.

The advent of the team, the arena and the Arena District replaced a condemned state penitentiary and sparked a rebirth of downtown Columbus. As the team goes the Arena District goes. If the District is the heart of the city then the Blue Jackets have most certainly been its heartbeat, bringing an energy, a pride and a passion previously unseen downtown. In fact, multiple markets have since visited Nationwide Arena and the Arena District, and consider it the model for how a professional sports team and venue can energize a city and become an economic engine for development.

On an annual basis, the Blue Jackets and Nationwide Arena employ over 1,500 full-time and part-time workers which results in over \$7.5m in state and local taxes. In 2008, an independent study conducted by The Ohio State University indicated that the Blue Jackets and Nationwide Arena generated over \$850m in spending over the first ten years of the franchise's existence. Now, eleven years later, we believe the cumulative impact to be over \$2B.

Additionally, giving back to the community that supports us is key to our mission. We are very proud of the Columbus Blue Jackets Foundation and the team's community outreach programs. The Foundation has granted over \$11m to local organizations and our staff, coaches and players have given countless hours of service since its inception.

Like many other industries, the pandemic has taken a heavy toll on the Blue Jackets and the other professional sports teams and organizations in Ohio. Professional sports were the among the first to shut down and will be the last to return to normal operations. Nonetheless, the NHL and the Blue Jackets ownership remain committed to carrying on our mission of bringing a Stanley Cup to Columbus and improving the quality of life here in Central Ohio.

Columbus and the state of Ohio receive tremendous exposure and recognition via the national and international media covering the Blue Jackets in the form of tv, radio, digital and social media. Fans travel from all over to Columbus to watch their teams play the Blue Jackets, for

special events such as the World Cup of Hockey pre-tournament games in 2004 and 2016, the 2007 NHL Draft, the 2015 NHL All-Star Weekend and hopefully for a Winter Classic Outdoor Game at the Shoe sometime in the near future. All 82 of our games are broadcast back to the home markets of the visiting team as well as nationally for select games, providing three-hour commercial exposures for Columbus and the great state of Ohio. For example, when the New York Rangers play here, fans throughout New York watch our games on MSG Network. When the Toronto Maple Leafs play here, fans throughout Canada tune in on Rogers SportsNet. In addition, there is the tremendous national and international exposure generated each time the Blue Jackets participate in the Stanley Cup playoffs such as in 2009, 2014, 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Having professional sports is important to the quality of life here in Ohio. As communities and as a state, we compete with other markets to attract talent and corporations that can offer more and better jobs. Our friends at “One Columbus” know the importance of our sports teams as they talk to businesses about moving their headquarters to central Ohio. As well, the corporate leaders in our community know the importance of pro sports when recruiting employees to Columbus.

Second, on the topic of sports betting in Ohio....Ohio’s professional sports teams and organizations from the NFL, MLB, NBA, NHL, MLS and PGA TOUR recognize the potential benefits of having a legal, regulated sports betting market in the state. As an industry that drives billions of dollars in economic impact and employs thousands of Ohioans, the professional teams are firmly aligned in supporting legislation that enables the franchises to partner with a regulated sports betting operator for market access into the state. As the legislative process continues, Ohio’s professional teams are ready and willing to work with lawmakers and support legislation that ensures integrity, drives the greatest local and state economic impact and empowers the ability of teams to partner with sports betting operators for market access.

Time is of the essence. Tax revenues and economic impact are already being lost. An estimated \$130B per year in sports gambling is already happening illegally in our country. Ohio residents can cross the border into neighboring states such as PA, IN, WV and MI to place legal sports bets and gamble on our games, driving tax revenues and economic impact to the coffers of other states instead of right here in Ohio. Passing sports gambling legislation will result in millions of dollars per year in tax revenue. Given the pressures on state budgets, how can we ignore the opportunity to capture these tax revenues and alleviate the burden on Ohio’s taxpayers?

The Columbus Blue Jackets support the usage of league data to ensure accuracy of information when settling bets.

We support measures to allow the leagues to monitor activity and opt out of bets that may undermine the integrity of the game.

We ask that the major professional sports teams and organizations be given market access including the opportunity to control both a mobile and a retail sports betting license and partner with a licensed operator. To be clear, the professional teams are not asking to operate a sports book, but rather, to partner with a licensed and regulated sports betting company. Allowing us to

partner with a sports betting operator will generate critical revenues the teams need to continue to invest in their home markets and to compete to win championships.

As stated earlier, our mission is to bring a Stanley Cup to Ohio. The professional sports teams in each league compete with one another for the talent and resources to win championships. Illinois, Virginia and Washington, D.C. have already passed laws providing teams with the ability to control mobile and retail sports licenses. Arizona, Texas, Florida and Maryland all have legislation pending that would offer similar benefits to teams. Ohio's professional sports teams will be put at a significant competitive disadvantage if we do not capitalize on these revenue sources while teams in other states benefit.

Sports gambling itself is predicated on the existence of professional sports. Sports gambling revenue is made off the billions of dollars invested by Ohio's sports teams and the content we create. Simply put, sports betting does not exist but for the investment of our sports teams and organizations. It is the integrity of our games and our industry that is at risk and our teams that are being put at a competitive disadvantage without these revenues.

In conclusion, we submit that sports gambling should be enacted now to take the revenues already being generated out of the pockets of illegal sports betting operators and into the pockets of Ohio's taxpayers, to support the continued operations of Ohio's sports teams, to level the playing field with other states and to increase fan engagement while protecting the integrity of our games.

On behalf of the Columbus Blue Jackets, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We look forward to working with this committee to create a model for sports gambling that generates tax revenues for our state, that protects the integrity of the games we play and that supports the teams continued investment so we can bring more corporations, talent, tourism, media exposure and championships home to the great state of Ohio.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.