



Representative Jeff LaRe
77th House District

Electronic Bingo-House Bill 65 Testimony

Chairman Schuring, Vice-Chair Manning, and members of the Senate Select Committee on Gaming, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the topic of electronic bingo. I would like to take this time to discuss House Bill 65 and the common sense that this legislation could provide the Ohio revised code as it seeks to modernize and bring increased integrity to Ohio's charitable gaming laws.

At the forefront of this discussion, I'd ask that you keep in mind the proposed legislation for electronic instant bingo would simply codify the law to allow for an electronic version of a charitable game that is already permissible under Ohio law.

History

Charitable paper bingo was authorized by the Ohio Constitution in 1975. The Ohio Attorney General's office regulates charitable gaming and oversees the issuance of gaming licenses. Organizations that are permitted to conduct charitable bingo include veteran organizations such as VFWs and American Legion posts, fraternal organizations, and 501(c)(3)s.

The revenues from charitable bingo go to fantastic causes such as to families of fallen Westerville officers, Ohio disaster relief, veterans' wheelchair games, and to the Wright

Patterson Airmen & Family Readiness Center. Funds have also been used to support veterans struggling with PTSD, homelessness, and severe medical issues.

Modernization

House Bill 65 would allow charitable organizations the option to offer both paper and electronic formats for instant bingo. The bill defines “slot machines” to not include electronic instant bingo since they are played and regulated differently. Precedence for House Bill 65 can be found in states that have already legalized electronic bingo including Kentucky, Virginia, Minnesota, New Hampshire and North Dakota. There is also evidence that the introduction of electronic bingo gaming will both boost revenues for the licensed organizations and attract younger members. Therefore, in passing this piece of legislation we can support veteran and fraternal organizations, and empower them to make an even greater impact on their communities.

Integrity

The bill would also address the security and integrity of electronic instant bingo devices. As the regulator of charitable gaming, the Ohio Attorney General would be responsible for managing the state’s electronic instant bingo. Not just any organization would be allowed to provide these devices as they need to be licensed by the Attorney General’s office and be in good standing with the IRS. Additionally, this legislation will increase the integrity of the charitable game by removing the human element from game operation and report generation. Criminal penalty is provided in House Bill 65 for any individual who uses these devices outside that of the scope of practice as defined by the Attorney General.

Ending Remarks

For those members who were here during the last General Assembly, you may recall House Bill 282 and Senate Bill 345 that were introduced regarding the subject of electronic bingo. House Bill 282 received no opponent testimony in the House Finance Committee, and the bill passed out of the House by an overwhelming bipartisan majority. So why did this bill become so contentious once during the last General Assembly. I think we all know that answer. A good friend of mine once told me that pigs eat, and hogs get slaughtered. That should hold true in this matter. We cannot let the greed of a few deny the sustainability of our veteran and fraternal organizations, who in turn support all of our communities.

It is time to bring charitable gaming into the 21st century and legalizing electronic instant bingo would bring many great benefits to our veterans' and fraternal organizations and the charitable causes they support.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.