

Written Testimony of Lindy Infante Foundation
Member of PLAY Sports Coalition
Before the Ohio Senate Select Committee on Gaming
June 9, 2021

Chair Schuring, Vice Chair Manning, Members of the Committee:

The Lindy Infante Foundation appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony regarding Ohio's proposed sports wagering legislation. Our organization is committed to helping advance youth sports for underserved communities through grants and sports equipment to organizations and families in need throughout the state of Ohio. By covering the cost of youth athletics we are able to connect youth to a greater sense of purpose, growth, and opportunity, ensuring that all kids have access to sports regardless of their zip code. We are proud to have partnered with and supported the great work of LiFESPORTS at the Ohio State University, the Columbus Recreation and Parks Department, and so many other deserving youth sports nonprofits throughout central Ohio.

In addition, we are a proud member of the PLAY Sports Coalition ("the Coalition"), which stands for Promoting Local and Youth Sports. The Coalition consists of community and national sports organizations and leaders formed to support young athletes, working families, coaches and volunteers across all 50 states, particularly those in underserved areas. Our mission is to ensure that youth and local sports survive and thrive coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, providing families and especially youth opportunities for physical and mental health, character and leadership development and repairing a society that needs community, connectivity and joy. The co-founder of the Coalition, LeagueApps, has also submitted testimony on this issue for the Committee's consideration.

We encourage you to allocate 5% of tax revenue from legalized sports wagering for youth sports and recreation programs. All kids – regardless of zip code or ability – deserve access to high-quality youth sport experiences. These programs lead to the development of healthy children and communities, which in turn can help address a range of well-established challenges, including obesity, crime, and depression. Earlier this year, New York became the first state to allocate a portion of mobile sports betting revenue to funding grants for youth sports programs serving under-resourced areas and families. Now, Ohio has the chance to help kids in underserved communities access youth sports – and experience the associated physical, mental, social, and academic benefits.

In Ohio, there is an immediate need for youth sports programs – as well as additional revenue to fund these programs. In March 2021, the Aspen Institute's Project Play released *State of Play Central Ohio*, attached to this testimony. The report analyzes the state of youth sports in the Central Ohio region and offers recommendations to grow quality access to sports, physical activity and outdoor recreation for all children, regardless of race, gender, income or ability. The report found that financial barriers prevent 20% of surveyed Central Ohio youth from playing sports more often.

Moreover, inequities in youth sport access and participation throughout Central Ohio reflect disparities across race and ethnicity. To address some of these issues, State of Play suggests creating a coalition dedicated to increasing equitable access to quality sports and recreation for all children, among other recommendations.

Youth sports programs can lead to health, educational, psychosocial, and financial benefits. Physically active children are less likely to be obese, less likely to smoke and use drugs, more likely to go to college, and have lower levels of depression. Unfortunately, there's a relative lack of access for minority children nationwide. Sport participation rates for white children exceed that of African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asian kids. Further, household income is the biggest driver of early participation in sports. Earmarking even 5% of revenue derived from mobile sports betting for youth sports programs can make a huge impact on underserved communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic further proved the importance of sport for kids and communities. Last year's unprecedented events and the resulting forced pause in play stopped our entire youth sports industry, leaving it with an uncertain future amid the unsettling impact of the pandemic. A recent survey from the Youth Sports Collaborative Network showed that the pandemic had a dramatic impact on young people's activities. The participating youth sports programs serving under-resourced communities reported that 84% of their registered youth have not regularly participated in sports due to the pandemic. And in Central Ohio, White youth have spent 46% more time playing sports than Latino/Latina youth and 39% more time than Black youth during the pandemic.

We believe setting aside a small portion of sports wagering revenue can make a huge difference in young athletes. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing. We look forward to working with the Committee, the legislature, and other stakeholders on this important issue.