



June 10, 2021

Interested Party Testimony

Ohio State Senate Select Committee on Gaming

Chairman Schuring, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Craig and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony as an interested party regarding SB176.

As a professional managing a specialized gambling treatment program in Toledo, Ohio, and as Vice President of The Problem Gambling Network of Ohio (PGNO), I appreciate your time and dedication to these important issues related to gambling legislation. I would like to provide a local perspective as to how gambling has impacted fellow Ohioans in my community.

The Zepf Center is one of the largest providers of mental health and addiction services in Northwest Ohio. In our Ashland facility alone, we serve over 1300 clients in various substance addiction treatment programs including detox, residential, partial hospitalization, outpatient, methadone and suboxone and recovery housing, etc. At Zepf Center we screen all our clients regularly for gambling disorder and have historically averaged around 1 of 5 clients (20%) as scoring high enough to possibly meet the criteria for gambling disorder.

When looking at the number of people struggling with substance-based addictions, we suddenly see a massive population of people who may also be struggling with problem gambling. We know from the *Ohio 20016- 2017 Gambling Study*¹, and other research, that in Lucas County alone over 3500+ gamblers may at some point meet the criteria for gambling disorder. This number becomes even more terrifying when we look at the Statewide statistics showing over 919,162 Ohioans who may at some point cross into problem gambling.

Gambling is a truly hidden addiction; you cannot smell it, people do not slur their words or stumble around because of gambling. The consequences of gambling are more subtle and corrosive. This includes, lost productivity, divorce, bankruptcy, foreclosure, and the criminal thinking and behavior which is the hallmark of financing any addiction. My own lived experience as an active problem gambler, alcoholic and drug addict (13 years sober) I was spending over \$300.00 on gambling, drugs and alcohol per day, with no job. These number are not out of the ordinary at our facility and more improperly regulated gambling will continue to make issues worse.

The impact on vulnerable populations such as males 18-44, veterans, older adults, Asian/pacific islanders, college students, African Americans and those with co-occurring mental health and addictive disorders, etc. and worse, adolescents using computers to access gambling in video games or falsely stating their age to gain access to adult based gambling sites. All these problems will be made more prevalent if pending legislation is passed without proper safeguards.



The issue is not any single form of gambling, it is the dramatically increasing number of ways and opportunities to gambling in Ohio. The expansion of gambling in Ohio (SB176) to include sports wagering and E-Bingo is a prime example. As a group, we are not opposed to gambling in any way, we are however, in full support of responsible gambling and what reasonable person would not agree with that position.

As I look at the impact that gambling has had on my community, I want to make sure that resources are available, and protections are in place to lessen further harm. Zepf Center has one of the largest and most successful gambling treatment programs in Ohio. Our outpatient gambling program currently (as of today) has more gambling clients in treatment than in our substance addiction detox unit and SUD residential programs combined. According the *Ohio 20016- 2017 Gambling Study*¹. Since the casinos returned to Ohio, problem gambling prevalence rates have doubled from under 5% to over 10%. Gambling addiction may be on the precipice of another huge increase if this legislation is passed without proper safeguards.

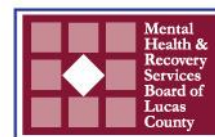
I, along with my fellow gambling treatment professionals at Zepf Center are joining with PGNO members and many concerned Ohio citizens to stand behind the efforts of PGNO in seeking appropriate consumer safeguards in SB176. I have taken the liberty to include those responsible gambling measures for both sports wagering and E-bingo below.

Minimum Responsible Gambling Measures for Sports Wagering:

- Set and enforce the minimum legal age to wager at 21 and include age verification measures.
- Dedicated funds (2-5%) of all sports wagering tax revenue to be directed to prevent, treat & research gambling addiction and mitigation of harms.
- Designate the Ohio Casino Control Commission as the regulatory agency.
- Require responsible gaming programs, which include comprehensive employee training, self-exclusion, ability to set limits on time and money spent.
- Requirements for the inclusion of help/prevention messages in all marketing and promotion.
- Clear marketing guidelines to provide clarity of promotions, odds of winning, and the costs to participate.
- Include the Ohio Problem Gambling Helpline and/or other statewide resources on all communications from the operators.
- Permit sports wagering at casino/racino properties, and if mobile, only provide for one mobile license/property.
- Limit sports wagering to US professional sports.
- Include sports betting in the Ohio Voluntary Exclusion program.

Minimum Responsible Gambling Measures for E-Bingo:

- Designate the Ohio Casino Control Commission as the regulatory agency.





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- Set and enforce the minimum legal age to wager at 18. Operators have an affirmative obligation to put in place technical and operational measures to prevent access by those who are underage.
- Dedicate a portion of the funds from licensing to prevent, treat & research gambling addiction and mitigation of harms.
- Require e-bingo operators to implement responsible training for all staff and volunteers, which shall include warning signs of problem gambling and gambling help resources.
- Require help/prevention messages in all marketing and promotion.
- Have clear marketing guidelines to prevent targeting vulnerable populations, including: youth, elderly, military and minorities.
- Include the Ohio Problem Gambling Helpline and/or other statewide resources on all communications from the operators
- Set limits for the number of e-bingo machines per establishment.
- Limit e-bingo to inside each licensed establishment.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony as an interested party. I look forward to working with you further on these, and other, important issues impacting Ohioans.

Steven H Kapela MSW, LISW, LICDC-GAMB, ICGC-II
Manager of Problem Gambling Treatment and Prevention
Zepf Center 2005 Ashland Ave. Toledo, Ohio 43620
Office Tel. 419-841-7701 x6111
Cell: 419-377-6046 NEW

¹ Linley, J., Frohnapfel-Hasson, S., Sherba, R. T. (n.d.). 2017 Survey of At-Risk and Problem Gambling Prevalence Among Ohioans. Columbus, OH: Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

