

Testimony of Merle Pratt
AMVETS Department of Ohio
&
Ohio Veterans and Fraternal Charitable Coalition
Regarding Sub SB 176
Ohio Senate Select Committee on Gaming
June 10, 2021

Chairman Schuring and members of the committee:

On behalf of Ohio's 700,000 plus veterans, I want to thank you for addressing the issue of electronic charitable gaming. As you know, we have been dealing with this issue since 2011, so it is encouraging to finally see the legislature taking action to help veterans, fraternal and the hundreds of charities they support throughout the state.

After reviewing the changes in the sub bill, there is one change that concerns Ohio's veteran and fraternal organizations; that is the limit of six devices per location.

While six devices may be more than enough for our smaller posts, there are posts with larger occupancy and membership levels, and limiting the number of devices to six for those locations will have a detrimental impact on our ability to support our charities.

These locations have an enormous impact on their communities. Limiting them to just six devices will limit them to providing less support to vital causes.

Which charities should they deny funding? Should they bury fewer indigent veterans? Should they provide fewer college scholarships to local youth? Should they provide less assistance to local veterans who need help with medical bills, rent, or utilities?

If you look at laws in other states, you will see a variety of limits on the number of machines...but none are as restrictive as six devices per location.

For example:

New Hampshire has no limit.

Kentucky has no limit.

North Dakota's limit is 10 devices per location.

Virginia's limit is 18 devices per location

Minnesota permits 6 devices for locations with up to 250 members and 12 devices for locations with over 250 members.

The veterans groups were initially led to believe that the free market would determine how many machines a post could support. We agreed with that philosophy because these devices do not offer huge payouts like the slot machines that are offered at for-profit casinos.

I would respectfully ask the committee to consider a fair compromise that follows the free market philosophy of the Committee, but satisfies the for-profit casinos' desire to monopolize all gaming in the state. I would like to suggest the following number of devices per location be capped at:

0-500 members, 6 machines

500-1000 members, 12 machines

1000-1500 members, 18 machines

Over 1500 members, 24 machines

Our smaller posts will likely end up with four or five devices because that is what their membership can support. But there are larger posts with membership levels that can support more devices. Why do we want to limit the amount of funds these locations can raise for the charities in their communities?

I think we are getting caught up on limiting the number of machines when the goal should be to maximize benefits to veterans and their communities. The e-bingo games are for our members to play for fun while supporting their post and charities. They do not offer life-changing winnings. Not even close. However, limiting locations to just six devices is simply too restrictive for a great majority of our larger locations.

None of our posts has any interest in becoming miniature casinos. That is not what we are about. The device limits I have suggested will allow posts to maximize their charitable purpose while also providing the legislature reassurance that charity will continue to be our mission.

And I think it is also important to remind you that these are private organizations. They are not open to the general public. Members of the general public are not permitted in our locations unless they are a guest of a member. Any fears of the general public coming in just to play e-bingo and locations ramping up to having hundreds of devices is unwarranted. But the device limitations we are suggesting will provide you with a guarantee that this will not happen.

Thank you once again for your hard work on this bill and for your consideration of this important request.