

**Senate Select Committee on Gaming  
June 15, 2021  
Written Interested Party Testimony – Senate Bill 176**

Chairman Schuring and Members of the Senate Select Committee on Gaming, the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio (NAMI Ohio) thanks you for the opportunity to give written interested party testimony on Senate Bill 176.

My name is Terry Russell, and I am the Executive Director at NAMI Ohio. We represent 500,000 individuals and families with serious mental illness. NAMI Ohio's mission is to improve the quality of life, and ensure dignity and respect for person with serious mental illness. NAMI Ohio offers support, education and advocacy across the state and among our 40 local affiliates.

NAMI Ohio is neutral regarding legalized gambling and gambling expansion, and has no financial interest in expanded gambling in Ohio. We do know from state gambling surveys, increased access to gambling results in increased rates of problem gambling. Expanded gambling exposes a new audience to gambling, which will result in an increased demand for prevention, intervention and treatment services. The behavioral health field and NAMI Ohio are working to identify the kinds of regulations and consumer protections that could be put in place to address the continued evolution of gambling in Ohio.

Senate Bill 176 would be the largest gambling expansion Ohio has ever seen, and has significant implications for the behavioral health field and the individuals and families we serve every day. Given the significant risk factors for those living with mental illness and veterans have for developing mental health, gambling, and substance use problems, this is particularly concerning. Senate Bill 176 provides no limits as to the number of machines per location, no requirements to train staff, and no funding dedicated to support those who will be negatively impacted. The sports betting portion of the bill would allow for up to 40 sports betting licenses throughout the state, with no requirement that the license holders have any experience or knowledge of gambling and gaming, or the necessary responsible gambling measures that are critical to protect citizens.

As with other forms of gambling, there is a significant portion of the population who experience negative consequences as a result of gambling. It is incumbent upon our governmental bodies to help both operators and their customers by requiring reasonable regulations that will ensure the health and safety of our citizens.

For these and other reasons outlined below, NAMI Ohio recommends the following provisions for consumer protections be considered in SB 176. These are recommendations come from the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) highlighting reasonable consumer protections with sports gambling to ensure Ohio provides the safest environment.

1. Reliable age verification is required, and the state must determine what the legal sports gambling age will be, 18 or 21? Safeguards are needed to prevent underage gambling. Face-to-face account set-up, such as at a casino or racing, provide the best controls to promote responsible play.
2. Two percent of taxes collected should be for services to assist individuals and families impacted by problem gambling engaged in the OhioMHAS system of care.
3. Need constant and conspicuous use of the Ohio Problem Gambling Helpline number 1-800-589-9966.
4. Built-in opportunities for players to pause play are needed to allow for breaks and other activities.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Should you have any questions, please contact me at [Terry@namiohio.org](mailto:Terry@namiohio.org) or 614-224-2700.