



Advocating for Life, Faith, and Freedom in the Public Square

To: Members of the House Finance Committee
From: Chris Long, President Ohio Christian Alliance
Re: Opponent testimony, H.B. 298

I would like to thank Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee for hearing our testimony today in opposition to H.B. 298.

H.B. 298 constitutes the largest gambling expansion to date in Ohio history. The four casinos approved by voters in 2009 only consisted of four specific locations where gamblers would have to go to access the casinos. During the Kasich administration in 2011, gambling was expanded again at seven racetracks known as the racinos. In 2021, Governor DeWine expanded gambling with sports betting. The Ohio Christian Alliance, along with other conservative and faith organizations, has long opposed gambling expansion in the state of Ohio. The pastors in our network know from first-hand experience the absolute scourge the problem gambling can be for individuals and families. Long counselling hours have been logged by these pastors, dealing with the grief and loss of those who have lost their homes, families, and self-worth due to gambling addiction.

Calls to Ohio's problem gambling helpline increased 55% in the first year of legalized sports betting (2023). There was a 277% increase in helpline calls related to sports gambling in January 2023 compared to January 2022. The top reasons for calling the helpline have shifted towards daily fantasy sports and sports betting. (Reported by United Way of Greater Cleveland, March 20, 2024 and The Columbus Dispatch, Feb. 13, 2024).

If H.B. 298 is passed, problem gambling will explode. Most vulnerable are 18–24-year-olds, who have the highest risk for problem gambling. Whereas previous efforts to legalize gambling in Ohio have been restricted to four casino locations, seven racinos, and sports betting, H.B. 298 now constitutes a casino in your pocket with your mobile device, a seven-day-a-week, 24-hour casino. This is a disaster of epic proportions. The rates of problem addiction in the state of Ohio will explode and take a huge human toll on our citizens. In 2012 the percentage of Ohioans with a gambling problem was 5.7%. In 2022 it jumped to 19.7%. Twenty percent of problem gamblers have attempted suicide. Now, with the proposed internet mobile expansion of H.B. 298, the rates of problem gambling will increase dramatically, and with it the human toll.

Better minds must prevail and stop H.B. 298 from becoming law. That is why we, along with a number of faith and family organizations, are urging a no vote on H.B. 298. Thank you, Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, and Ranking Member Sweeney, for receiving our testimony in opposition to H.B. 298.