



Kansans For Fair Play

March 11, 2020

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Kansans for Fair Play, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 2671, AN ACT concerning gaming; relating to the Kansas expanded lottery act; authorizing sports wagering.

Kansans for Fair Play is a group seeking to reopen Kansas parimutuel racetracks. This is accomplished by leveling the playing field and ending disparities in taxation between state-owned casinos and racetracks in Kansas. For those not aware, state-owned casinos pay 22 percent to the state, but pari-mutuel racetracks are required to pay 40 percent, making it difficult to break even. That's why no single racetrack or racetrack gaming facility is open in our state today and hasn't been for more than a decade.

Leveling the playing field and allowing the tracks to re-open in Kansas would create the kind of positive economic impact all of us believe is essential to the growth and prosperity of our state. We're talking about an almost immediate increase of 4,000 new jobs for Kansans and \$200 million in wages paid annually. This kind of economic activity would also generate significant tax revenue collections for the state of Kansas. But as it stands today, we're losing money. Closure of the tracks has resulted in the state losing out on over \$2.4 billion in wages paid and hundreds of millions in lost tax revenue. Not to mention the missed opportunities for Kansas agri-businesses, which are equally significant.

Kansans for Fair Play supports H.B. 2671 because, unlike the Senate's sports wagering legislation, H.B. 2671 permits a racetrack gaming facility to offer sports wagering just like the state-owned casino gaming facilities

Opponents to including racetracks in sports wagering legislation will likely tell you that the racetracks are closed and therefore, should be excluded. I would submit to the Committee three tracks in Kansas could be opened tomorrow, with two of those tracks having the ability to also

offer wagering through slot machines. Again, they are closed because they cannot operate in the black due to current revenue sharing requirements contained in state statute.

Kansans for Fair Play has every confidence that the status quo will not be permitted by you or the people of this state to continue in perpetuity. The legislature will eventually, hopefully sooner rather than later, do the right thing and act to grow jobs, incomes, and tax revenue by creating parity in gaming revenue taxes. The tracks will re-open in Kansas, and when they do, they should have the right to offer sports wagering just like the casinos.

Finally, I would also urge this Committee to include language that would authorize a vote in Sedgwick County regarding the question of slot machines at the former Wichita Greyhound Park. A vote on a confusing ballot question thirteen years ago in 2007 failed by just 343 votes, with 50,429 people voting for it and 50,772 people voting against it. However, a poll this summer of 500 registered voters in Sedgwick County found that 91% of those surveyed wanted the opportunity to vote on slots being placed at the Wichita Greyhound Park. Only 5% said a vote should not take place. Even more telling was that 66% of those surveyed said they would vote in favor at the Greyhound Park. Only 25% said they would vote no.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, it is time to allow the citizens of Sedgwick to vote on slots at the former Wichita Greyhound Park. There is no harm in allowing the people to vote on this simple question. Those who would tell you a vote alone would somehow put the state in peril simply are not telling you the truth.

I respectfully ask that the Committee pass H.B. 2671 with racetracks included and that you consider letting the people have their voices heard in Sedgwick County.

Thank you, and I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Very truly yours,



Jason P. Watkins