



Proponent Testimony on House Bill 531
House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee
Columbus Blue Jackets

March 20, 2018

Chairman Blessing, Vice-Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on House Bill 531, which would establish the Sports Event Grant Fund to make grants under Ohio's Major Sporting Event Grant Program.

My name Michael Priest and I am the President of the Columbus Blue Jackets. Ohio established the Major Sporting Event Grant Program in 2009 to assist local organizing committees in securing very large competitively bid sporting events. To qualify, an event must be projected to generate at least \$250,000 in an incremental increase in the state sales tax. Historically, the program has been funded on a biennial basis, which has proven challenging because there is no assurance that the program will be funded in out-years. Cleveland, for example, is already bidding on events for 2025. For this reason, HB 531 is needed as it will create a long-term funding mechanism for this program.

Columbus hosted the NHL All Star game in 2015—this event was a huge boost to the local economy, with thousands of visitors and millions of dollars in direct economic impact. However, at the time of the event, there was no funding available through the program. This resulted in a considerable challenge to raise the funds we had anticipated receiving from the state. Without this type of state support in the future, we would have to take a hard look at whether to host another similar event. There are considerable costs associated with these types of special events for the space, utilities, security, manpower, etc. Instead of substantial revenue generators, we view these events as extremely important in connecting with our community.

HB 531 would contribute half of the incremental state sales tax increase attributable to a qualifying event to the grant fund. Grants would then be made from the fund to fulfill a portion of the obligations required by a site selection organization.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important topic. I ask for your support of House Bill 531 and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.