



Thomas E. West
State Representative, 49th District

Chairman Green, Vice Chairman Greenspan, Ranking Member Sheehy and members of the Transportation and Public Safety Committee. Thank you for taking the time today to consider House Bill 346. This bill will designate a portion of State Route 172 connecting Canton and Massillon as the "Football Heritage Corridor." This will help promote tourism in the region and will honor Stark County's legacy as the birthplace of football as we know it.

The Ohio League, founded in 1902, was the direct predecessor to the modern NFL. It consisted of teams from Portsmouth, Zanesville, Youngstown, and many other small Ohio towns. Most famously, it created the longest continuous rivalry in football: the Canton Bulldogs vs. the Massillon Tigers. This rivalry continues today in the annual high school game between the McKinley High School Bulldogs and the Massillon High School Tigers. In 1915, the Canton Bulldogs signed Jim Thorpe and created football's first superstar. Five years later, the NFL was founded in Canton, and the rest is history.

Today, nearly 200,000 tourists visit the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, bringing millions of dollars to the region. The Hall of Fame was recently voted as [the #1 tourist attraction in Ohio](#). However, the surrounding area does not reap the benefits of this spending. The Football Heritage Corridor would help to expand the economic benefits of the Hall of Fame to the surrounding region while honoring Stark County's role in creating our nation's most popular pastime. If this bill is passed, local activists plan to fundraise for the beautification of this highway in order to further promote this tourism.

Thank you again for your time today, and I look forward to taking your questions.