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Senate Resolution 342
Sponsor Testimony
February 21, 2018
Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee

Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Uecker, Ranking Member Schiavoni and members of the Ohio Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee. Thank you for allowing me to present sponsor testimony on Senate Resolution 342.

Columbus Crew fans were stunned, blindsided, hurt and angered last fall, as their beloved team was playing in the Major League Soccer (MLS) playoffs, when the investor-operator and chairperson of the Columbus Crew Soccer Club announced his intention to explore the relocation of the franchise to Austin, Texas. This came as a shock to the central Ohio Community that has embraced this team from the very beginning and is proud to call the Columbus Crew Soccer Club their team.

Major League Soccer's inaugural season kicked off in 1996 with much anticipation as the founding ten members – five teams each in both the Eastern and Western Conferences – ushered in a new era for professional soccer in the United States. The Columbus Crew Soccer Club was a part of history as it has been a part of the central Ohio community since 1996, as it was the first charter member of Major League Soccer. In fact, Columbus is home to the first soccer-specific stadium in the United States which was a huge investment in a fledgling soccer league that was young and uncertain as to its stability. Today, Major League Soccer has expanded from 10 original clubs to 23 soccer clubs spread out through the country and league expansion is continuing as more cities are being awarded with franchises.

The Columbus Crew Soccer Club fans have been there from the beginning—rooting for the Black and Gold for 22 years. In 2014, the club's 19th season at MAPFRE Stadium, the Black & Gold set club attendance records for both most cumulative attendance and most sellouts.¹ The have cheered on their pitch heroes such as Brian McBride, Stern John, Freddy Garcia, Jon Busch, Robin Fraser, Simon Elliott, Jeff Cunningham, Guillermo Barros Schelotto, Steve Clark, Federico Higuain and local standout Wil Trapp.

¹ <https://www.columbuscrewsc.com/post/2014/10/24/crew-set-attendance-record-sundays-match>

The Columbus Crew Soccer Club has represented the city of Columbus nationally and internationally with a high level of skill, determination, confidence, and character, earning them the nickname "America's Hardest Working Team." In 2008, the Columbus Crew won their first MLS Cup defeating the New York Red Bulls in the final 3-1. In 2004, 2008, and 2009, the Columbus Crew was honored with the Supporters' Shields, which is an award bestowed upon the team that finishes at the top of the league with the most points earned. In 2002 the Columbus Crews won the Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup.

Not only is the Columbus Crew successful on the pitch, through its charitable arm, Crew SC Foundation, they have worked to strengthen the Columbus community through numerable volunteer hours with programs such as Soccer Aid, fundraisers for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, Columbus Reads, Keep Columbus Beautiful, Soccer for Success, and the Kirk Urso Memorial Scholarship, and through the adoption of the Linden-McKinley STEM Academy boys varsity team, helping Linden-McKinley to field a team for the first time in ten years.

Columbus Crew Soccer Club has produced an economic impact of \$20 million to \$25 million according to an economic impact study the franchise commissioned in 2011, and has secured high-profile corporate sponsorships in the intervening timeframe with major companies like Mapfre Insurance, central Ohio's Barbasol, and major central Ohio employer, Honda, through Honda's Acura brand.

With the announcement of a possible move to Austin, Columbus Crew Soccer Club fans have rallied and mobilized to #SaveTheCrew. Local communities have passed resolutions supporting the efforts to keep the Crew and numerous window clings are in business windows across central Ohio to share their support for the #SaveTheCrew movement. Their mission is simple and plain---They want to keep the Columbus Crew and its club's rich history and tradition in Columbus-where it has been a part of our community for 22 years.

The message of this resolution is simple—The Ohio Senate urges the investor-operator and chairperson of Columbus Crew Soccer Club to keep the franchise in Columbus. People care about the Columbus Crew and it is a huge part of the central Ohio family.

Chairman Coley and members of the Ohio Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee. Thank you for allowing me to present sponsor testimony on Senate Resolution 342. I am happy to answer any questions that the committee might have.