

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer and Members of the Committee:

My name is Andy Kellar and I am the athletic director for Wooster City Schools. I am writing this testimony on behalf of Adaptive Sports Program of Ohio. As you may know ASPO received funding four years ago to develop a pilot program for a school-based wheelchair basketball team. Upon receiving funding for the pilot program, Lisa Followway contacted me to discuss the idea of Wooster City Schools becoming the school to pilot the program. Without hesitation, I agreed to become the pilot program and help develop the team. As an athletic director, I understand the benefits that athletes receive from education-based athletics. I would like to share some of those benefits with you. These are facts that are confirmed in numerous studies. High school student athletes perform at a higher level in the classroom and graduate at a higher percentage than non-athletes. High school student athletes are more likely to attend college than non-athletes and are more successful in their careers, than non-athletes. Athletic opportunities are readily accessible to able body athletes, but extremely limited to disabled athletes. Other benefits that athletics provides are, but are not limited to, learning to develop relationships with team mates and coaches as well as acquiring team work and to be a team player. Learning how to set goals and work hard to achieve them. Learning how to deal with defeat and failure and to rise above them. These types of benefits are endless and anyone that has competed as an athlete at any level understands the value of athletics. I feel it is imperative that we all try to provide opportunities to disabled athletes, to give them the same opportunities as able-bodied athletes. At Wooster we have always strived to include athletes with disabilities, but the fact is we have 25 boys and girls team sports and only one team sport for those with disabilities, which is our wheelchair basketball team. That number for every high school in the state is zero, with the exception of the other four schools that currently have wheelchair basketball. In addition to the general benefits of athletics that I have stated above, I would like to give you a real-life example. Next year, Wooster Evan Heller, who joined our team three years ago will graduate and is going on to play wheelchair basketball in college. One thing I am certain of is that if Wooster did not have a wheelchair team for Evan to participate on, he would not have had the opportunity to play at the next level and receive a college education.

You may be asking yourself the question, why wouldn't every high school add a wheelchair basketball team? The answer is simple for those athletic directors and that answer is their budgets can't afford the cost of the equipment. Most schools including mine rely on ticket sales to fund their entire athletic department expenses. Without the help I received from ASPO, Wooster would not have been able to afford the equipment costs. If the school's athletic budget could afford the equipment, then the year to year operating cost are minimal and affordable. If you can help schools get over the hurdle and fund the cost of equipment, I am certain we can expand our current number of five teams and positively affect thousands of disabled students with the power of sports.

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