



Proponent Testimony in Support of HB 196  
Nonprofit gym sales tax exemption  
Ways & Means Committee | Ohio House of Representatives | October 29, 2019  
Howie Beigelman, Executive Director, Ohio Jewish Communities

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of the Committee:

We are here today to testify in support of HB 196, which, as you know, would correct an error in which nonprofit community centers have a sales tax on memberships as if they are considered a for-profit fitness center. We are grateful to Rep. Jena Powell for leading on this, and I'd like to also thank former Rep. Jim Buchy, for whom this is a priority as well. As you're aware, Ohio Jewish Communities is the statewide government advocacy, public affairs, and community relations voice of the eight Jewish federations and their some one hundred fifty agencies across Ohio. As I think you also know, when we say Jewish, we are referring to our values. Our community's services are always available to anyone of any faith and of no faith at all.

Perhaps that's nowhere as true as our Jewish Community Centers, which are also holistic and all-encompassing centers offering cradle-to-grave opportunities for physical, mental, and spiritual health and wellness.

You have or you will hear and read some of this in more detail from some of our centers, of the wide swath of the Jewish - and non-Jewish - community they touch, of how much they give in scholarships each year, and more.

But let me just touch on a few of the key points.

Our community centers are not spas. Nor are they for-profit gyms. In Ohio, and across the nation, these centers are precisely as their name implies: centers of community life, beginning with early childhood and preschool care, as well as after school services, and programming for those with special needs and disabilities, subsidized senior services, including hot, nutritious lunches, sometimes the only such kosher option for congregational meals for miles. These centers are open twelve months a year, every day of the week.

And their reach is beyond their members and even their campuses: to parents and siblings of critically ill children, to elderly shut-ins, to students at schools without gyms and sports facilities, to Holocaust survivors and victims of other traumas in need of a safe space, and more.

These are more than just statistics or anecdotes. It showcases how these are truly communal centers.

One final example that stands out to me as a sad, but shining, model:

Just two days ago we commemorated a significant one-year anniversary. Jewish Americans that Saturday did something we all took for granted. Freely, and fearlessly, they went to Sabbath services to pray. Less than three hours later, eleven innocent people were murdered in the worst terror attack against Jewish Americans in history.

On that day, and in the days and weeks that followed, there was only one place the FBI set up their Mass Fatality Incident Family Assistance center. There was only one place that became the one-stop for families, victims, survivors, community members, and Good Samaritans.

Nowhere but the Pittsburgh JCC could meet all those needs.

What they want most is to offer their services - to be a community center - to even more people. That's what this legislation will do. It will help lower the barrier to entry. It will help even more people get the health and wellness and community outreach opportunities they need.

Thank you for this opportunity. I'm happy to take any questions.