

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, I am the executive director of Adaptive Sports Ohio and I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 110.

Every student deserves the opportunity to play school sports. While sports are a privilege and not a right, the Rehabilitation Act insists that interscholastic activities be afforded equally to students with and without disabilities. Sadly, and detrimentally, sports are not equally offered and students with disabilities in Ohio are sitting on the sidelines missing out on all of the important benefits they provide.

It has been our privilege to work with the Ohio Legislature during the last three budget cycles to promote change and provide interscholastic wheelchair basketball to students with physical disabilities. Starting as just an idea in 2015, we moved from a pilot program with one team to a league including six school districts (Austintown, Jackson, Tallmadge, Wooster, Massillon, and Plain). Pre-COVID-19, we were on course to double that number and expand to 12 teams for the 2020-2021 school year. This is now our goal for the 2021-2022 school year. In two weeks, we are heading to southwest Ohio to launch a team in partnership with Lebanon City Schools. Rep. Lipps was key to our expansion in that region.

Fueled by the support our organization received from the State, we accomplished what we set out to do: work alongside school districts to create opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in sport and improve their social, emotional, physical and academic outcomes. This program works and I am proud to share with you a few examples. Evan from Wooster graduated in 2020 and is now playing collegiate wheelchair basketball at Auburn University on scholarship. Gavin from Jackson experienced more physical improvements in three months of wheelchair basketball than two years of physical therapy. Savannah from Massillon feels more confident and empowered than before she started playing. Data from the program has been provided to you in addition to my testimony.

We are grateful that the Ohio Legislature has invested in this program over the last six years. We respectfully ask for the reinstatement of the adaptive sports program earmark in the FY22-23 budget. Thank you all for your consideration and I am happy to answer any questions at this time.