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Sponsor Testimony for House Bill 415

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Brennan, and esteemed members of the State and Local Government Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 415, which establishes the Ohio Sports Commission. Before we dive in, I want to mention that my joint sponsor, Representative Santucci, who recently had a baby, couldn't be here today. But as any good teammate knows, sometimes you have to step up and cover the play. So, I'm here today with him here in spirit.

I begin with a question:

How much does the sports industry bring to Ohio across the entire state?

While we can point to the remarkable success stories from cities like Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati, the reality is that we do not have a complete understanding of the full economic, cultural, and social impact of sports on every community in Ohio. House Bill 415 seeks to answer that question while building a strategic framework to unleash the potential of the sports industry for every corner of our state—rural, urban, and Appalachian alike.

Ohio's sports industry is already a proven economic powerhouse. The 2024 MLS All-Star Game, which recently took place in Columbus, generated approximately \$30 million in local economic impact. Since 2002, Columbus alone has generated \$625 million in visitor spending from sports events. Northeast Ohio has seen \$860 million in economic impact since 2000, including \$42 million from the 2021 NFL Draft. And in Greater Cincinnati, professional sports contribute over \$550 million annually to the local economy.

These numbers are impressive, but they tell only part of the story. Ohio's sports industry has untapped potential in rural and Appalachian communities that are eager to grow their local economies through emerging markets like esports, adventure racing, and adaptive sports. House Bill 415 provides the framework to

ensure that every region of Ohio shares in the economic and social benefits of the sports industry.

It is important to emphasize that this Commission is not intended to replace the commendable work of local sports commissions across Ohio. Instead, it will serve as a statewide extension, providing additional resources and coordination to amplify their efforts. By aligning statewide strategies with local initiatives, we can create a cohesive approach that maximizes the benefits of sports tourism and development for all regions.

I think we can all agree: Sports isn't Republican or Democrat—it's the ultimate unifier. Whether you're cheering for the Browns, Bengals, Guardians, Reds, or Buckeyes—or even rooting for the underdog—sports have a way of breaking down barriers and bringing us together. Beyond the excitement on the field, sports create jobs, drive tourism, and generate revenue. But more importantly, they foster pride, strengthen communities, and showcase the very best of Ohio. This Commission will be the engine that ensures every corner of our state—regardless of politics—reaps the benefits of these opportunities.

I've often joked with Governor DeWine that, if this bill passes, the Ohio Sports Commission will be one of the hottest commissions to be appointed to. Imagine Ohio as the go-to destination for the next major sporting event, the home of innovation in sports tourism, and the place where sports and economic development meet to create unmatched opportunities.

The 17-member board of the Ohio Sports Commission will have a critical role to play. They will:

1. Study the promotion and development of sports tourism across Ohio to unlock its full potential.
2. Partner with private and public stakeholders to bring in major events that drive economic growth.
3. Develop policy recommendations to support sports-related infrastructure, funding, and development.
4. Explore a new grant program to bolster emerging sports economies in underserved regions, ensuring the benefits of sports tourism extend across the state.

By establishing the Ohio Sports Commission, we are taking a bold step to grow our economy, showcase our state on the national and international stage, and create a framework for sustained success in sports tourism for generations to come.

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the committee, thank you for your time and consideration as we move House Bill 415 down the field. I'm ready to tackle any questions you may have.