

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Finance Committee, my name is Abby LaPole. I recently completed my freshman year at Jackson High School, located in Stark County, and I'm one of the many students involved with the Adaptive Sports Ohio Interscholastic Wheelchair Basketball Program.

Long before I got involved with ASPO, back in elementary school, I loved basketball. During recess, my friend and I would play basketball any chance we had. However, since I'm an amputee, I can't really run and jump like the other kids. So even the thought of playing on an actual basketball team was just some far-fetched fantasy. I ruled it out as an option. I thought that two person games of horse were as good as it would get, and sadly, that's how I felt for a long time.

As I progressed through school, I always wanted a friend like me, another amputee, or someone else with physical challenges. Each school year, I made new friends, but none were the type I felt I truly needed in my life. I still needed to find other kids that would understand what it's like living with physical challenges. Everyone made friends through sports or something similar, and I always wished I could have that.

Then one day I heard that there would be an assembly to introduce the new Jackson Wheelchair Basketball team. It was the coolest thing I had ever seen and I soon joined the team. Little 6th grade me was so happy to finally be able to say, "Sorry, I have practice," or "I have a game." It was all so exciting to me. My family still remembers the first thing said when I started, "I can finally be part of a team." Every game brought new friends and more people like me. It made me so happy. It gave me the chance to represent my school and show them an amazing sport that changed my life and the many other lives of kids like me.

When I'm playing wheelchair basketball, I see respect, kindness, and compassion flowing between teams. When I first joined the team, I tried to make baskets but none of them would make it in. Opposing teams would give the ball back to me and let me try to make a basket again. I thought about

the kindness I was shown and how much it meant to me at one of my recent games. I told a girl on another team to shoot, and when she missed, I gave the ball back to her and said, "Shoot it again!" with a smile on my face. As the game continued I thought about how someday that little girl might do the same for another person.

Being part of the Interscholastic Wheelchair Basketball program has completely changed me. It is such a wonderful experience because everyone understands what you are going through, even though everyone has a different story. You are accepted as you are. Not only am I part of a team, but I am part of a family. I've become more comfortable with who I am and really started not caring what others think. My confidence in myself and my abilities has grown tremendously and it's changed my life. Each year that I play with the program, I embrace who I am even more.

Adaptive Sports Ohio is a blessing. They're more than an organization, they have become a family that opened my life to a whole world of adapted sports that I never realized existed.

By bringing a wheelchair basketball team to my school district, Adaptive Sports Ohio gave me hope, happiness, and the feeling of equality. I am finally on a team. I am now able to set goals for myself that I would've never thought possible just a few years ago.

Thank you for your time.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.