



Chair Miller, Vice Chair Hiner, Ranking Member Jarrells and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jason Pheister, and I am here on behalf of Charter Communications, the parent company of Spectrum and Spectrum News 1. We appreciate the Committee's ongoing work to support Ohio's student-athletes, families, and local communities, and we respectfully testify in opposition to House Bill 697.

Who We Are and Our Role in Ohio High School Sports

Spectrum News 1 is the Ohio High School Athletic Association's (OHSAA) official television partner. Spectrum has been an official partner of OHSAA since 2007, when it entered into a partnership as Time Warner Cable with SportsTime Ohio to televise OHSAA playoff and championship events. **Prior to 2007, our predecessor companies had existing relationships to televise and produce high school games dating back to the 1980s.**

Today:

- Spectrum News 1 is the official television partner of OHSAA, providing comprehensive coverage of postseason and championship events across the state.
- Spectrum distributes dozens of local and Public, Educational, and Governmental (PEG) channels across the state, many of which also produce and air high school games, further expanding local exposure for student-athletes.

Through these partnerships, Spectrum has invested heavily in professional production, technology, and staff to deliver high-quality coverage of Ohio's student-athletes and their communities.

Under the existing framework, OHSAA partners with two primary media entities. **Spectrum News 1** is OHSAA's official television partner, with exclusive live video rights to selected OHSAA postseason events in football and basketball. Regular season games are not managed in this agreement but directly with host schools. For contests televised by Spectrum News 1, no other video play-by-play productions (live or delayed) are permitted for that same contest. For tournament contests only streamed (not televised) by Spectrum, no other live video play-by-play productions are permitted, but delayed video coverage is allowed if the facility can accommodate the request.

Separately, OHSAA contracts with NFHS Network to stream live video content. Live audio broadcasts are always permitted regardless of the live video telecasts. If there are space

issues, the participating schools or OHSAA may develop a priority system to determine which broadcasts receive media credentials to cover the event.

The selection process is structured and transparent. Spectrum makes the first selection of football and basketball playoff games to air on television and stream on the Spectrum News app, and after Spectrum's selection, NFHS Network selects its games. Postseason contests not selected by either Spectrum or NFHS may be available to other media outlets for live video coverage (TV or streaming), at the discretion of OHSAA and with payment of a rights fee under the tournament rights chart.

This model balances several objectives:

- High-quality, statewide coverage and production standards.
- Revenue and cost-recovery for schools and OHSAA.
- Opportunities for other local media where games are not selected by primary partners.
- Clear rules that avoid logistical and safety conflicts at venues.

Why Charter Opposes HB 697

1. Legal and Regulatory Overreach into Private Contracts

HB 697 would set a precedent for the state to intervene directly in the core economic terms of media and content distribution agreements for a specific category of programming. Exclusive rights are a standard commercial tool used across the media industry to support investment and ensure predictable, high-quality coverage.

Once the state begins to dictate that certain types of content cannot be subject to exclusive agreements, it introduces:

- Regulatory uncertainty.
- A chilling effect on future partnerships and long-term planning; and
- A slippery slope to further statutory intervention in other types of content.

This is particularly concerning where, as here, there is no evidence that the existing model is harming students or communities. On the contrary, it has supported extensive, high-quality exposure for Ohio's student-athletes for decades. **This also begs the question of how far the government could reach into private contracts. Could government also**

intervene in terms and agreements for ticket distributors, concession stand vendors, janitorial services, or companies who print programs?

2. Creating Operational Conflicts at Venues

HB 697 would force OHSAA and schools to accommodate multiple broadcasters—professional, local, and student-run—for the same live event, often in constrained facilities. That creates practical challenges:

- Limited space for cameras, announcer positions, and production equipment.
- Increased safety and crowd-management concerns.
- Potential interference among multiple productions competing for vantage points and facility resources.

This is exactly why collegiate and professional sports also enter into agreements with broadcast companies to ensure high quality production for their viewership. Under the current model, OHSAA and its media partners can carefully plan production operations for each venue. Allowing multiple simultaneous live broadcasts by statute risks chaotic, inconsistent, and potentially unsafe conditions that schools will be left to manage.

3. Ambiguity Around Digital and Streaming Rights

HB 697’s broad definition of “broadcast” likely encompasses a wide range of digital and streaming platforms. That raises questions about:

- How statutory rights would interact with existing streaming partnerships, such as the NFHS Network’s exclusive live streaming rights to selected OHSAA postseason tournaments.
- Whether social media streaming, apps, and other digital platforms are covered, and how to resolve conflicts when multiple entities claim overlapping rights.

The current OHSAA-Spectrum-NFHS framework clearly allocates television and streaming rights, with defined opportunities for other media where events are not selected. HB 697 risks creating confusion and conflict in an area that is currently workable and predictable.

4. Undermines the Economics That Support High-Quality Coverage

Exclusive or semi-exclusive rights during OHSAA tournament play are the foundation that allows us to invest in:

- Professional production crews.

- Multiple camera angles, replay, graphics, and commentary.
- Statewide distribution on linear television and streaming platforms.
- Pre-game, halftime, and post-game coverage that highlights schools and student-athletes.

By prohibiting exclusive live video rights for postseason contests going forward, HB 697 erodes the economic model that supports this level of investment. Without confidence that a partner's live coverage is protected, the incentive to commit significant resources—especially for less predictable or lower-viewership contests—is diminished. The likely result is **less investment and lower production quality** for postseason events, not more.

5. Risk of Less, Not More, Coverage in the Long Run

The bill's intention is to expand access and ensure local or school-based broadcasts are not blocked. But by weakening the core rights that underpin major media partnerships, HB 697 could:

- Make it less attractive for professional partners to cover certain postseason contests, especially those with smaller audiences or higher production costs.
- Reduce the number of games covered with professional production values and statewide reach.
- Leave some schools with only ad-hoc or lower-quality coverage instead of the current, consistent, statewide platform.

In short, the net effect could be **less reliable, less professional coverage of Ohio's postseason events**, particularly in the long term.

Conclusion

Spectrum is proud of our long-standing partnership with OHSAA and our history of showcasing Ohio's student-athletes on a statewide stage. The existing model has delivered robust, professional, and widely accessible coverage, while still allowing for other media opportunities when events are not selected.

HB 697 would disrupt that model in ways that threaten the quality, consistency, and sustainability of postseason coverage. It introduces legal and operational uncertainties and undermines the economic foundation that supports significant media investment in Ohio high school sports.



For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to reject HB 697 in its current form or to work toward alternative approaches that support local access and school participation without weakening the proven media partnerships that benefit students, schools, and communities across Ohio.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.