

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Franklin Nicola and I was very fortunate to be on the Austintown Local Schools Wheelchair basketball team for over five years. I was born with Erb's Palsy that left me with very minimal movement in my right arm. I started at the end of my seventh-grade year when my neighbor who has Cerebral palsy asked me to play for the team. After I played I realized I actually wasn't too bad, but most importantly I enjoyed it. I started my first full season my 8th grade year and led the team in points per game and led the team to their first ever winning record. Through my next four years of high school I was about to become a four-year letterman, three time all Ohio, 2023 Athlete of the year, 1000-point scorer, and a two-time state runner up.

I always had a passion for basketball, so during my seventh-grade year I was the manager of the middle school basketball team. Ultimately, I never ended up playing for the middle school team, but once I was introduced to wheelchair basketball my life changed for the better. For the first time in my life I had the initiative to improve in school and get better grades, look into actually going to college, and also improving on my leadership skills to become the best leader I could be for the team. In the end I believe wheelchair basketball and my coach Cara Hahn had a huge role in helping me become a better man and a strong leader.

On the other side of wheelchair basketball, it brought me many friendships, but most importantly it brought me a lifelong friend who is somebody that played a huge part in my success in wheelchair basketball but also someone who is a big part of my life outside of basketball. I think that wheelchair basketball goes far beyond just basketball, but it gives kids a reason to want to succeed, it gives them meaningful friendships like I've gained, and it gives kids

a role model to look up to. For that reason, is why I am now the assistant coach of my former team the Austintown Falcons.

Currently I just finished my freshman year at Youngstown State's Sokolov Honors College where I plan to get my bachelor's degree and master's degree in the BSN Financial Planning Track. I am the first person in my family to attend college and while doing so I am also working for the honors college as a student staff member. I am working hard to achieve my personal life goals and I feel that playing wheelchair basketball helped shape me into the man I am today and the man I will become.