

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Zayne Hammoudeh and I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 96.

I'm a 9th grader at Green High School in Summit County. I've been playing wheelchair basketball in my district since the 8th grade, when it first began. I am the youngest in my family with 2 older siblings, that have always been active in sports for our school district. When I was in the 3rd grade my school district had basketball tryouts for all the "typical" kids. I'm a bit shorter than most of my peers, but still decided I wanted to go to tryouts. When I got to the gym, one of the coaches approached my mother to tell her that I was not supposed to be at this tryout since they underestimated me and my size. I was able to continue and complete the tryout, but never to make the travel basketball team. I was heartbroken, and just wanted to be able to play basketball with my school friends. I didn't understand why I couldn't at the time, since I was so young.

Fast forward 5 years later to my 8th grade year, and finally, due to the hard work and dedication of Adaptive Sports Ohio's CEO Lisa Followay, Green local school district, organized a wheelchair basketball team! It has been amazing to be able to represent my school as my older siblings were able to do before me!! My peers come to my games and cheer me on as I did for their games. It makes me and my teammates so much more confident walking down the school hallways. When kids we don't even know come up to us and tell us last night's wheelchair basketball game was awesome to watch. It makes kids like myself feel like we are seen and a part of our school. We are not just the kid with crutches or the person in the wheelchair. We are athletes!

Programs like wheelchair basketball promote inclusion, social skills for a lot of kids who do not get a chance to socialize otherwise, teamwork, and physical fitness. It is unfortunate that all school districts do not have this program available due to lack of funding, because it is a life

changing program to children that would just be sitting at home doing nothing all because they were born with a physical disability they had no control over.

Thank you for allowing me to share my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.