

OHIO SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Opponent Testimony on Amended Substitute House Bill 96

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Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee – thank you for this opportunity to offer written opponent testimony on the current version of Am. Sub. House Bill 96.

The City of Cleveland strongly opposes the inclusion of a \$600 million bond package in the bill to support the construction of a new domed stadium in Brook Park. This proposal lacks regional consensus and directly conflicts with long-standing planning efforts and public investments already made to revitalize Cleveland’s lakefront.

The City of Cleveland has coordinated with local groups, state and federal partners, as well as regional stakeholders to develop a shared vision for a reimagined lakefront anchored by a transformed stadium. The Haslam Sports Group (HSG) had been a significant and serious participant in this effort. The City has taken the following bold steps to deliver on a transformed lakefront:

- Finalized a comprehensive lakefront master plan;
- Advanced the design of the North Coast Connector to improve downtown–waterfront connectivity;
- Created the North Coast Waterfront Development Corporation, a non-profit solely focused on the lakefront;
- Established the North Coast Waterfront New Community Authority to support infrastructure investment;
- And secured more than \$150 million in federal and state funding to make this vision real — including \$20 million from the State of Ohio, which we deeply appreciate.

The North Coast lakefront is not just a priority for Cleveland — it is an asset of statewide importance. It serves as a civic front door, a hub of tourism and recreation, a platform for economic development, and a symbol of Ohio’s Great Lakes identity. The transformation of this area offers the chance to connect people more directly to the water, support local entrepreneurs and small businesses, attract billions of dollars in private investment, and spur economic growth that benefits the city, the region, and the state. This is not merely a Cleveland project — it is a generational opportunity for all of Ohio.

Let us be clear: Cleveland intends to move forward with redeveloping the lakefront — whether or not the Browns remain on site. The vision and commitment are not contingent on any single outcome. However, the departure of the Browns would affect the timeline, cost, and scale of the project.

Last week, the City and its development partners released a preliminary marketing document to nearly 20,000 developers worldwide, promoting the once-in-a-generation opportunity on Cleveland's waterfront. This document — prepared in partnership with CBRE — is designed to generate early interest and signal the availability of development-ready land tied to Cleveland's lakefront vision. The offering includes up to 20 acres north of the current stadium. If the Browns leave, that footprint could grow to 50 acres — but at the cost of significant delay and disruption.

Initial conversations with developers have made one thing clear: the site is far more attractive with a modernized stadium as its anchor. If the team abandons the City, the economics of lakefront redevelopment become far more challenging. The existing stadium would need to be demolished — a process that couldn't begin until 2029 at the earliest, assuming the Browns do not extend their lease. That means Cleveland could lose at least five years of development momentum. We are ready to build now. The stadium transformation offers a faster, more cost-effective, and less disruptive path forward.

Not long ago, the transformation of the existing lakefront stadium was HSG's preferred option. To their credit, HSG helped spark the conversation surrounding a reimagined site and lakefront. And it remains the fiscally and logistically sounder path. A new domed stadium in Brook Park is projected to cost no less than \$2.4 billion — and that figure excludes necessary public infrastructure, traffic mitigation, and environmental review.

The proposed \$600 million in state-issued bonds — backed by Ohio's General Revenue Fund, one of the state's most vital and broadly relied upon funding sources — would divert scarce public resources away from Cleveland and other communities facing urgent infrastructure and economic development needs. Once interest is factored in, the bond package alone could cost taxpayers more than \$1 billion. And history shows that stadium projects of this magnitude frequently require far more than initially projected. Beyond this potential commitment, additional public funds for road improvements, utility upgrades, site preparation, and environmental mitigation are almost certain to follow — placing even greater demands on taxpayers.

This proposal asks the public to assume an enormous financial burden for a project that conflicts with existing plans, lacks local consensus, and undermines a more cost-effective alternative already underway in Cleveland. When public dollars are on the line — particularly at this scale — the public deserves a meaningful voice. The communities most directly affected must be at the table. That includes the people of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, who would also bear the opportunity costs of disinvestment and delay.

The City of Cleveland urges the Committee to remove the \$600 million bond provision from House Bill 96. More broadly, we respectfully request that the Committee and the Ohio Senate

take all necessary steps to ensure that public dollars — regardless of the funding model — are not directed toward a new domed stadium in Brook Park.

Thank you for your time and consideration.