

Dear Chair Cirino, Vice-Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Senate Finance Committee members,

Thank you for considering my written testimony in opposition to providing taxpayer funding for a new Browns stadium. This budget provision is particularly odious when full funding of the well-researched and bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan has been deemed by House Speaker Matt Huffman as “unsustainable.”

While Rep. Brian Stewart suggested that the \$226 million allocated for school funding is an increase over what public schools received in 2025, Finance Ranking Member Bride Rose Sweeney explained that his statement is misleading. She explained, “What is being produced is likely one of the lowest state shares in our state’s history...meaning that it’s even less state money going into our schools than when this was deemed unconstitutional.”

For Rep. Stewart to say, when questioned about the cut, “Well, when you see the proposal, which was ‘Well just increase the inputs to FY ’24,’ that was the ask – it cost \$1.8 billion to the taxpayer....We simply don’t have it.” And yet, the state somehow has \$600 million to pay for a sports stadium?

Allocating \$600 million – by whatever funding means – for a stadium while ignoring the needs of the 90 percent of Ohio’s children who attend public schools is simply unconscionable.

The Haslams apparently convinced Ohio House Republicans that they can be trusted to make good on taxpayer stadium subsidies, but I wonder how many lawmakers were convinced they could trust the Haslams by means of generous campaign gifts, and the \$100,000 of support to defeat the anti-gerrymandering initiative last fall?

What tangible economic benefits can taxpayers expect from the proposed \$600 million budget allocation? Can we really expect to have “multiple Super Bowls played in the stadium,” as Rep. Brian Stewart has promised? Never mind that fact that the Browns went 3 – 14 last season, Rep. Stewart believes the new stadium will be a “destination center.” What evidence suggests this will come to pass? Apparently, Rep. Stewart is simply taking the Haslams’ word for it. No evidence needed.

It’s convenient to ignore what would happen to downtown Cleveland if the Haslams leave the lakefront stadium for Brook Park. Rep. Stewart seems not to have considered the expensive infrastructure nightmare that would be created by such a move. This proposition gambles on land that is near the very busy Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. No more walking to the stadium from convenient downtown parking spots. No more contributing to Cleveland’s local restaurants, etc.

There is local opposition and pending litigation against any funding for the Brook Park stadium proposal, which Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne has called a “risky bet with public dollars.” Whose best interests are actually being served? Clearly, not the city’s.

And if the Haslam plan fails, who will pay? Taxpayers, of course.

The budget, in its current form, would take vital funding from libraries, Medicaid expansion, and even pediatric cancer research. Will lawmakers be able to look themselves in the mirror – and then face their voters – if they deliberately divert public money to \$600 million in government debt with very questionable (if any) positive impact?

The state’s budget director has called putting up \$600 million in bonds for the project “risky.” Office of Budget and Management Director Kimberly Murnieks wrote in a memo, “Abundant research over many years concludes that economic benefits do not outweigh the costs incurred by governments.... The promised tangible economic benefits – economic growth, income growth, wage growth, employment growth, and higher tax revenues – do not occur the way sports teams claim. State and city governments are subsidizing development within a single neighborhood, with no tangible benefits for the rest of the city or state.” She goes on to report that, because other capital projects are awaiting funding (including Dayton’s mental health hospital, Department of Youth Services facilities, prisons, state parks, and the H2Ohio program), the state “does not have the capacity to accommodate these priorities plus \$600 million in bonds for a single sports facility.”

Murnieks also counters claims of the new stadium bringing 6,000 construction jobs and 5,000 new jobs, saying that most of the “new” jobs already exist. Further, if the state owns the stadium, then the state would have to pay for its maintenance, to the tune of \$19.9 million per year. Murnieks recommends that, if the state owns the stadium, then the state should share revenue from events it hosts.

Further, Murnieks contends that the \$1.01 billion in estimated repayment costs “will likely cost close to twice as much as the Administration’s proposal to use cash from increased sports gaming tax.”

Ohio’s budget in its current form, and particularly the inclusion of a \$600 million allocation to a new Browns stadium, is a dismal display of misplaced priorities. We supposedly cannot fully fund the well-researched, bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan, which would – at long last – correct the long-ago DeRolph decision that found our state’s school funding method to be unconstitutional. And yet, we can toss public money to Browns owners to fund a stadium based on flimsy promises?

I trust that the Senate Finance Committee will take a long, hard look at priorities regarding the sorts of projects taxpayers should be expected to fund. I strongly urge that the \$600 million for a new Browns stadium be removed from the budget.

Sources:

* <https://www.statenews.org/government-politics/2025-04-28/ohio-budget-director-state-does-not-have-the-capacity-for-600m-in-bonds-for-browns-stadium>

* <https://www.daytondailynews.com/local/ohio-house-ditches-dewine-tax-proposals-funds-600m-browns-stadium-child-care-program-k-12-schools/JVHSHXQXLFFZ3LR7VTPOOJ4RUU/>

* <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2025/04/15/browns-owners-gave-big-money-to-ohio-lawmakers-who-are-now-making-risky-bets-with-public-dollars/>

* <https://www.news5cleveland.com/news/politics/ohio-politics/ohio-house-gop-slashes-public-school-funding>