

Ohio Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee

Opponent Testimony on Amended Substitute House Bill 96

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Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee — thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony in opposition to Amended Substitute House Bill 96.

As a Cleveland City Councilman, my ward has been home to the lakefront stadium where the Cleveland Browns have played for decades. And as a nine-year member of City Council, I have been involved in two successful downtown stadium renovations. Based on my experience — and the feedback from residents and businesses in my ward — I have strong concerns with the inclusion of the \$600 million bond package for the construction of a new domed stadium in Brook Park.

This proposal contradicts the principles of local consensus and responsible public investment. In Cleveland, we have a long history of engaging in collaborative, locally driven processes for major public infrastructure projects, including those involving sports facilities. Our past stadium agreements — achieved through hard work, community engagement, and careful negotiation — demonstrate the value of local decision-making and shared vision. Yet, this \$600 million bond package was proposed not only without local consensus but would result in significant economic harm to Cleveland's downtown, our lakefront, and our residents.

Relocating the stadium to Brook Park would undercut decades of public and private investment in downtown Cleveland. The current stadium is an anchor of our sports and entertainment district, which, along with Rocket Arena and Progressive Field, brings more than 4.3 million visitors to downtown Cleveland annually. This influx of visitors supports not just major venues but also an ecosystem of small businesses — including local restaurants, hotels, bars, and retail shops. These small businesses rely on game day foot traffic and the vibrant atmosphere created by Browns fans. For them, losing the stadium means losing critical revenue, which directly translates into lost jobs, boarded up businesses, and reduced tax revenue for public services. An economic impact study estimates that the loss of the Browns from downtown would cost our local economy more than \$30 million per year. This means real losses for hardworking Clevelanders, from the servers in our downtown restaurants to the independent t-shirt vendors who bring local pride to life.

Furthermore, a stadium transformation on the lakefront would cost less than half the proposed \$600 million, leveraging existing public infrastructure and aligning with our broader lakefront redevelopment plans. This approach would spur the transformation of Cleveland's iconic lakefront, drive economic growth, and build on our recent success in securing \$130 million in federal grants for the North Coast Connector, as well as an additional \$20 million from the State of Ohio — for which we are thankful to the Legislature. The North Coast Connector will finally create a direct, pedestrian-friendly connection between downtown Cleveland and Lake Erie, transforming the waterfront into a vibrant, accessible destination for residents and visitors alike. A transformed downtown Cleveland stadium offers a connected and activated lakefront, serving as an anchor surrounded by dynamic public space and development.

Additionally, House Bill 96 threatens to set a dangerous precedent by allowing state-level decisions to override local priorities and economic interests. The relocation of the Browns Stadium without local agreement disregards the community most directly affected. As an elected representative of the ward that has been home to this stadium, I can tell you firsthand that our residents, businesses, and community organizations have a clear interest in maintaining the stadium's presence on the lakefront, where it can continue to contribute to our city's economy and culture.

A project of this magnitude, funded in whole or in part by public dollars, must reflect local priorities and community support. I urge this committee to consider a policy that requires any stadium project receiving state funding — regardless of the funding mechanism — to have documented support from the local governments most impacted by these policy considerations. This would ensure that communities are not harmed by state-level decisions imposed without strong local input.

I respectfully ask this committee to consider the concerns I have outlined as you deliberate on the Ohio Senate's version of the state budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration.