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# STATE OF OHIO
# OHIO ATHLETIC COMMISSION

## TESTIMONY

## OHIO SENATE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

THE HONORABLE, SENATOR MANCHESTER
THE HONORABLE, VICECHAIR SENATOR BRENNER
THE HONARABLE, RANKING MEMBER WEINSTEIN
MENBERS OF THE SENATE OVERSIGHT AND REFORM COMMITTEE

STATEHOUSE
COLUMBUS, OHIO 43215

## OHIO ATHLETIC COMMISSION HB 59 TESTIMONY
APRIL 15th,2026

**INTRODUCTION**

Good morning, the Honorable Senator Manchester, the Honorable Vice Chair Senator Brenner, the Honorable Ranking Member Weinstein, and the members of the Ohio Senate Oversight and Reform Committee. My name is Charles Haskell, Executive Director of the Ohio Athletic Commission. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide Testimony to keep the Ohio Athletic Commission as its own Commission and allowing it to remain in its current Northeastern location, Youngstown Ohio.

**TESTIMONY**

The mission of the Ohio Athletic Commission is to maintain high standards for promoters, contestants, officials, and non-officials for all combative sporting events regulated by the commission. In addition to regulating events, the OAC regulates the licensing of Athlete Agents to protect the rights and interests of all college and high school athletes while they are in negotiations with professional sports agents.

The Ohio Athletic Commission resides in Youngstown Ohio and consists of five voting members appointed by the Governor and two non-voting commissioners, one from the Senate and one from the House, one Executive Director, one full-time employee. The OAC has currently selected a Temp worker to start as soon as all necessary paperwork has been submitted and approved. The OAC is a 4K90 funding source.

I am writing in opposition to HB 538 and HB 59 relating to the Ohio Athletic Commission. I believe combining the OAC with the Department of commerce creates unnecessary bureaucracy between the public and the governing body. Under the

proposed legislation, the Executive Director of Commerce would assign an Athletic Director. Combative sports is ever changing, and decisions are made right up to the day of the fight. Fighters cancel on a moment's notice, officials cancel last minute, fights fall off up to the day of the fight. Having the Executive Director of the Department of commerce assign officials while the Athletic Director oversees an event is not practical. The strength of the Ohio Athletic commission resides in the Executive Director's ability to be able to develop and maintain relationships with various worldwide combative sport promotions as well as regional and local promotions. The OAC is pleased to announce that a WBO world title fight is scheduled in Cleveland Ohio on July 4th, 2026. The revenue from high profile events is a major source of revenue for the State of Ohio. Bringing world class and national events to Ohio helps to advertise and sell Ohio on PPV, streaming services, and major networks. Balancing these events with several local and regional events help keep the bigger promotions coming back to Ohio. Over the last 20 years the OAC has done an outstanding job in maintaining and bringing back world-class entertainment. Youngstown alone has 5 past world champions. These relationships would be lost if the commission was moved to Columbus and combined with the Department of Commerce.

The concentration of combative sporting events is predominately in the Northeast. Youngstown, Cleveland and Akron have events almost every weekend. The concentration of these events in the Northeast supports the Commission to stay in Youngstown Ohio. Moving the Commission would be detrimental to the loss of local revenues as well as state taxes as the number of events would decrease. The OAC has developed extensive relationships with many of the officials, non-officials, gyms, and

athletes in the area. The sheer number of events in this area is evident as the number of boxing, MMA, and other combative sports licenses that have steadily increased for the last 5 years. The number of licenses in FY 2021 was 155. After covid restrictions where lifted the number of licenses rose to 430 in FY2022, 459 FY 2023, 541 FY 2024, and 616 competitor licenses in FY 2026. The increase in licenses is a direct result of the concentration of events in the Northwest. The more competitors the more non-official licenses such as trainers and seconds are required as well. Over 70 percent of the event permits are issued in the Northwest that encompasses less than one-fourth of the state. Moving the commission to Columbus would have a severe negative economic impact for Northeastern Ohio. I strongly believe we should support and grow Ohio's combative sports culture by keeping its roots firmly where they developed.

The OAC has close ties with local authorities across the state. Illegal fights are cropping up all over the country as social media fuels such participation. To my knowledge for the first time the OAC worked with local law enforcement in Northeast Ohio to prevent a series of illegal fights and prosecute the offenders. The OAC is continuing to monitor illegal fighting across the state. Many surrounding states work with the OAC to keep an eye out for such illegal fights in each other's states. The hope is to have local law enforcement shut down the event before it happens. This network will be lost if the commission is moved to Columbus and combined with the Department of Commerce.

Over the past couple of years, the OAC has had a rough transition to update the rules, policies, and laws pertaining to the Ohio Athletic Commission. Many new requirement submitting laws where needed to be adopted to bring all the rule reviews up

to date. I am pleased to say that the Ohio Athletic Commission is currently up to date and has implemented the proper procedure to change, keep, or add new rules to the administrative code or the Ohio Revised code. The OAC will continue to follow the guidelines set forth by the House and Senate. The transition from the past Executive director to the current Executive was vacillated almost instantly resulting in no time to learn the administrative processes necessary to operate the OAC. Since this time the OAC has updated its computers as well as its policy and procedures. It has seemed that many commission representatives and contacts from other departments have moved on to different areas or have retired. This change further facilitated the need for the current administration to catch up with policies and procedures.

In addition to a quick transition and a change in administrative personnel across the state the Ohio Athletic Commission had another big setback with the passing of its only full-time secretary, Judy McCarty. Judy at the beginning of last summer unfortunately took time off work to fight a reoccurring bout of cancer. No one was hired or interviewed during this time as we thought she would beat cancer yet another time. Despite all efforts she passed away in December 2026. She was the OAC secretary for well over 20 years. It is during this time that the OAC was operating with an Executive Director, myself and one part-time administrator, Melinda Mcquaide.

HB 538 was introduced as part of HB 59 in October 2025. Over the next month, the OAC updated all their laws with some reaching back to 2017. As a part-time secretary Melinda was able not only to organize the medicals but also take on Judy's responsibilities while I concentrated on updating the laws and dealing with the events. All the OAC rules were updated in December, and scheduled events went off without

interruption despite only having one full time employee and one part time employee. It wasn't until a few weeks ago that Malinda was able to take Judy's position as full-time Administrative Professional 4. We had set a back hiring a Temp worker that had to unfortunately decline the job opportunity. Fortunately, last week the OAC agreed on a Temp worker as she has filled out and submitted her paperwork. The OAC is excited to have her start as soon as possible.

Lastly, I have been involved in combative sports in both boxing and MMA since the early 2000's. I have promoted over 100 shows at amateur a pro levels. With this knowledge, I have expertise to ensure the best possible matchups without endangering the contestants. I understand the challenges of promoting and I am always available to figure out last-minute problems when the need arises. I will work with all promoters and fighters at any level to give them a fair and safe experience. As the current Executive Director of the Ohio State Athletic Commission, it is my goal to bring in more events, allow more combative sports if they meet the state guidelines, and provide the necessary structure to ensure the safety of every contestant and their matchup is as fair as possible.

I fully believe that if this commission is moved to Columbus and combined with the Department of Commerce, the needs of the Combative Sports community in Ohio will not be met and good endanger the health and safety of the contestant. If anyone has any Questions, please do not hesitate to call me.

Respectfully,

Charles R Haskell

Executive Director, Ohio Athletic Commission