

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Andy Kellar and I am the athletic director for Wooster City Schools. I am writing this testimony on behalf of Adaptive Sports Program of Ohio. As you may know ASPO received funding last year to develop a pilot program for a school based wheelchair basketball team. Lisa Followay, the director of ASPO, contacted me last year to discuss the idea of Wooster City Schools becoming the school to pilot the program. Without hesitation, I agreed to become the pilot program and help develop the team. As an athletic director, I understand the benefits that athletes receive from education based athletics. I would like to share some of those benefits with you. These are facts that are confirmed in numerous studies. High school student athletes perform at a higher level in the classroom and graduate at a higher percentage than non-athletes. High school student athletes are more likely to attend college than non-athletes and are more successful in their careers, than non-athletes. Athletic opportunities are readily accessible to able body athletes, but extremely limited to disabled athletes, therefore limiting these athletes from the benefits of athletics, that clearly help them become more successful in life. Other benefits that athletics provides are, but are not limited to, learning to develop relationships with team mates and coaches. Learning team work and to be a team player. Learning how to set goals and work hard to achieve them. Learning how to deal with defeat and failure and to rise above them. These types of benefits are endless and anyone that has competed as an athlete at any level understands the value of athletics. I feel it is imperative that we all try to provide opportunities to disabled athletes, to give them the same opportunities as able bodied athletes.

The second item I would like to address with you is the hurdles that this creates. The athletes that we are addressing have had to overcome hurdles their whole lives and I feel strongly about helping these athletes with opportunities. Creating opportunities does add a big hurdle for high school athletic departments. That hurdle is how do we fund these programs within our athletic budgets. Like Wooster, most high schools in the country rely on ticket sales at their home games to finance the entire athletic departments expenses. As an athletic director, I can tell you that it is an immense challenge to be able to fund an entire sports program from revenue generated from gate receipts. The challenge for athletic departments to solely be able purchase and maintain equipment to meet the needs of a wheelchair basketball team would, in my opinion, be nearly impossible. I am asking on behalf of ASPO, as well as, every public school in Ohio, that we financially support this effort to help provide opportunities to disabled athletes in Ohio's public schools.

Andy Kellar
Director of Athletics
Wooster City Schools