

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell and Members of the Senate Finance Committee thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak with you today in support of the Interscholastic Adaptive Sports Initiative. Adaptive Sports Program of Ohio (ASPO) received support during the FY '16-'17 budget to create and operate school-based adaptive sports pilot programs in two Ohio school districts. After leveraging significant additional foundation and corporate support, ASPO successfully implemented pilot programs in the Wooster and Massillon City School Districts. ASPO is now seeking increased funding support to scale the pilot program and provide additional interscholastic adaptive sports opportunities to disabled 1<sup>st</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade students across the State.

This financial support will enable us to:

- Provide equipment (including \$2,000 per piece sport wheelchairs) to school districts for the creation of an adaptive sports team
- Provide adaptive sport training for coaches and program administrators
- Monitor participating school districts to ensure program success
- Create the Interscholastic Adaptive Sports League infrastructure for governance

### **ADAPTIVE SPORTS FOR 1<sup>ST</sup> THROUGH 12<sup>TH</sup> GRADE STUDENTS IS CRITICAL.**

*First, access to sports is important for physical health.*

Children with disabilities are 3x more likely to be inactive than their able bodied peers. Inactivity is directly linked to the development of costly post-secondary conditions like obesity, high blood pressure and osteoporosis. Obesity rates in children with disabilities are 38% higher than children without. 18% of Ohio Medicaid enrollees consist of the aged, blind and disabled. This 18% makes up 60% of total expenditures. Providing an opportunity for students with disabilities to be active through school sports will improve their health and reduce healthcare costs.

*Second, access to sports is important for academic outcomes.*

As Andy Kellar will share with you and as the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) maintains, sports are an extension of the classroom and are an important part of a well-rounded education. Unfortunately, our most academically vulnerable population (students with disabilities) achieve only a 69% graduation rate in Ohio, at least in part because they do not have access to this academic benefit. For example, there are 1,593 high school boys and girls basketball teams in Ohio, and only two (2) wheelchair basketball teams (both of which were created through ASPO's successful pilot program).

*Finally, besides the other benefits, access to athletics for disabled children is required by law.*

Under Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act, students with disabilities have a right to participate in extracurricular activities in school. On January 25, 2013, the U.S Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights recognizing school districts' obligations, forcefully urged school districts to create additional opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in athletics.

To evidence the importance of these opportunities, our staff collected data from the students that participated in the pilot program. Survey results showed that 47% of participants experienced academic improvements, while 77% experienced social, emotional and physical improvements. As you can see from these results, this is about more than just providing sports. Wheelchair Basketball player Ryan has been bullied less since his classmates watched him play. Evan improved his gpa from 2.8 to 3.3 and is making plans to play wheelchair basketball in college. Savannah did not have confidence in herself before she started playing and now feels like she can do anything. Makayla is happy that she finally fits in somewhere. Monica Mendenhall, parent of one of the athletes, will testify about her daughter Alayna's improvements. This program is about real, documented life change for an underserved population. It is my understanding that the Ohio Department of Education is in full support of this program and that the Governor's office will not object to the inclusion of it in the budget. This small investment will serve as a catalyst and have a significant impact in the lives of this underserved population for years to come. Thank you.