



Proponent Testimony on House Bill 531
Senate Finance Committee
Dr. Jon A. Steinbrecher, Commissioner
November 27, 2018

Chairman Oelslager, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on House Bill 531, legislation to establish the Sports Event Grant Fund to make grants under Ohio's Major Sporting Event Grant Program.

My name is Jon Steinbrecher, and I am Commissioner of the Mid-American Conference (MAC), an NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision collegiate athletics conference headquartered in Cleveland, with six of our 12 member institutions in Ohio. The legislature established the Major Sporting Event Grant Program in 2009 to assist local organizing committees in securing very large competitively bid sporting events. To qualify, an event must be projected to generate at least \$250,000 in an incremental increase in the state sales tax. The event would then qualify for a grant up to half that amount.

House Bill 531 is important to my organization because we are active in hosting NCAA championship events in the state. Earlier this year, the MAC partnered with the Greater Cleveland Sports Commission to host the NCAA Division I Wrestling Championships at Quicken Loans Arena. The event we hosted in March set the total attendance record with 113,743 over the three-day wrestling tournament and the single-session wrestling attendance record of 19,776 during the NCAA Finals session on March 17, 2018. The event brought \$15 million in economic impact to the regional economy.

The Championship also garnered national attention, with ESPN's presentation of the Championships reaching nearly eight million fans over the course of the three days. A Fan Festival was held at Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland in conjunction with the Championship, offering the community a free event over the course of the Championship to celebrate and experience collegiate wrestling at its highest level.

When we partnered with the Greater Cleveland Sports Commission in bidding on this event three years ago, the Major Sporting Event Program was funded at \$1 million per fiscal year. Unfortunately, due to budget constraints, the program did not receive new funding in the last budget cycle and funding was not available to help offset the cost to host this event. This demonstrates the challenge with this program. With it being funded

on a biennial basis, there is no assurance that it will be funded in out-years. Given that local organizing committees are bidding on events into 2025 and beyond, this is a growing challenge.

We were thrilled to be notified that the MAC and the Greater Cleveland Sports Commission were recently chosen to host the 2024 NCAA Division I Women's Final Four in Cleveland. In addition to the funding that was needed to underwrite the bid process, we will need to raise more than \$2.5 million to support the event. State support for these events is something that site selection committees consider, and it is my understanding that this legislation was viewed favorably by the committee while making their decision.

HB 531 is extremely important for Ohio's ability to continue to host more of these marquee events. It would contribute half of the incremental state sales tax increase attributable to a qualifying event to the grant fund. Grants would then be made from the fund to fulfill a portion of the obligations required by a site selection organization. These events bring tremendous economic benefit to the state, as well as contribute to making our communities more attractive places to live.

On behalf of the member institutions of the Mid-American Conference, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important topic. I ask for your support of House Bill 531 and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.