

Chairman Richardson, Ranking member Troy, and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 110.

My name is Tom Linder and I am the Head Coach of the Tallmadge High School Wheelchair Basketball team in Tallmadge, Ohio. I was invited here this morning to talk to you about your continued support for wheelchair basketball in the State of Ohio.

I have been a coach in some shape or form for over forty years. I have been a coach at the youth, high school and college level. I have coached state champions and college All-Americans. I've won team championships at both the high school and collegiate level. I have experienced first hand the life lessons that are learned through participation in sports. I have watched student athletes overcome adversity and triumph against all odds.

But, I can honestly say nothing in the previous three decades of coaching prepared me for what I experienced the last two seasons as the coach of our schools wheelchair basketball team.

I took over the program as it began its second year. At our first practice I looked at my team, male and female student athletes from first grade to seniors in high school. Let me tell you a little about my team, the team that you supported with your legislation, a team that needs your continued support now.

Justin is a first grader with a healthy twin brother. I'm not sure how much Justin weighs but when I lift him into his chair I am reminded that it can't be much more than the large bag of food I bring home from the store for our family pet. Justin is tiny. What Justin lacks in size he more than makes up for in perseverance, determination and stubbornness. Pound for pound the toughest player on the court. (Justin "Mayor" Story)

Courtney is a high school teenager.....that in itself can be a day to day struggle. Courtney struggles with her self confidence and is well aware that she is different from most the other students she passes in the hallway everyday. When Courtney wheels onto the court its like watching Clark Kent step into a phone booth. She no longer has self doubt, her jaw set with determination frames a smile that she has no need for most of the school day. When Courtney made her first basket in a game...all was right in her world. No amount of medicine can give Courtney what being a member of the Blue Devil basketball team gives her everyday.

Shataeya is a fifth grader who has gone through more surgeries for her disability than even she cares to remember. She navigates the middle school hallways with a walker, but that's not what sets her apart from her classmates, no, it's her smile. One of those ear to ear smiles that is so big her eyes squint. She takes that smile everywhere she goes, unless of course it's game day, then she has her "all business" face on!!! A fierce competitor who is not afraid to hit you with her chair, trust me I know.

Iyad is a quiet fifth grader with Downs Syndrome. He leads our team in pre and post game cheers. So admired by his peers that they came out as an entire class with signs and cheers to watch him play.

Cory is a young man I have tutored personally at school the past three years. Basketball is his life. Sports are his life. Bound to a wheelchair makes life's simplest tasks a daily obstacle for Cory, but you would never know it. At school, everybody knows him, on game day they wish him luck, he wears his Varsity Jacket with pride. Making a basket in practice is hard to come by for Cory, making one in a game has yet to happen. For three years we've been working,

lifting weights, training just like any other athlete for that moment when it all comes together...I look forward to that day.

We have able bodied players on our team too. Young athletes who not only compete but nurture and mentor our athletes with disabilities. The interaction of our team and the compassion they have for each other is like no other.

One of our middle school able bodied students named Samantha took it upon herself to raise money so that our team could purchase their own "game" wheelchairs, allowing the team to practice during the off season. She raised over \$30,000 purchasing six chairs for her teammates. Not sure what you accomplished as a middle schooler but I've got nothing close to that!

That's just some of our team, a team that through your funding was made possible.

In closing, let me say that all these kids want is a chance. A chance to wear their school uniform, a chance to wear a varsity jacket like their classmates, a chance to have their community and peers cheer them on, a chance to compete and learn all the things that sports has to teach us that we use for the rest of our lives, a chance to be recognized as a member of their schools athletic program, but most importantly they just want a chance to be normal.

You have the opportunity to give these kids the chance to fit in, to be a part of a team, for those moments at practice and in a game or sharing a bus ride home after a win, when they can just be normal. It's really that simple.

I respectfully ask for your support of the adaptive sports program. Thank you all for your time and I am happy to answer any questions at this time.