

Committees:

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Sponsor Testimony
House Bill 220

Before the House Committee on Transportation & Public Safety

April 13, 2021

Chair Baldrige, Vice-Chair McClain, Ranking Member Sheehy, and members of the House Transportation & Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony for House Bill 220, which will create a University of Alabama specialty license plate.

My father, Ron Bird, was born on Jan 8, 1942. He was the son of a boilermaker and the grandson of a carpenter in the small Northern Kentucky community of Latonia, Ky.

He was uninvolved as a middle school student but was determined to change that in the 8th grade. So when an announcement was made for students to join the band, he borrowed the family saxophone and brought it to school the next day. While looking for the band room, he got lost and ended up in the locker room. The coaches encouraged him to stay and join the football team. Despite the leather helmet and no facemask, his mother allowed him to play.

His high school football success allowed him to be recruited by Paul "Bear" Bryant and he attended the University of Alabama on a football scholarship. His senior year, 1964, with Joe Namath as quarterback, Alabama won the National Championship.

Since then he has been a HS teacher and FB Coach for over 50 years in Ohio. He has been inducted into the Southwest Ohio Football Coaches Hall of Fame, and the Ohio High School Football Coaches Hall of Fame in 2007, which you can see at Ohio Stadium.

During his 50 years of coaching football in Ohio, he has influenced the lives of thousands of young men who have played for him. He has been an example of class, character, sportsmanship, and that football teaches players incalculable lessons in teamwork and life. I am introducing this bill in his honor.

I grew up in Ohio and I am forever a fan of Ohio State football. I rooted for OSU this past year in the national championship game. But I am also forever grateful for the educational opportunity that was afforded my father by the University of Alabama and the change it made in the lives of my family. His college education led to me and my siblings all becoming college grads. And all of my children are or will soon be college grads.

Education changes lives and this bill would raise scholarship money that would affect the lives and future of some high school students in Ohio right now. We all know that Ohio State University and

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other public and private universities in Ohio attracts students from all 50 states, including the state of Alabama, and from countries around the world. Why? Because people know that Ohio is a great place to learn, live, grow, and raise a family.

Despite the obvious advantages of attending an institute of higher learning in Ohio, we are still going to have some of our high school grads choose to attend a college outside of Ohio.

Last General Assembly, this body set the precedent for allowing an out of state university on our license plate by approving the license plate for the University of Notre Dame. This bill follows that precedent by permissively allowing individual Ohioans to support higher ed scholarship money through their license plate for Ohio high school graduates who will be attending the University of Alabama, just like the "Notre Dame" bill allowed individual Ohioans to support the cost of higher education at Notre Dame. We know that college is expensive and this will allow a few more students to get through college with a little less debt.

I would encourage my colleagues to see this bill as a way of allowing individual Ohioans to support higher education. This bill is not about athletics or athletic rivalry. Just like the important, life-long lessons learned by the football players who played for my father, this bill is about much more than a game.

Chair Baldrige and members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to present this bill before you today. I am happy to answer any questions from the committee.