

April 8, 2019

Dear Committee Chair,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide this testimony for the Soap Box Derby to be recognized as the “gravity racing state symbol for Ohio”.

Consideration for the Soap Box Derby’s recognition as the “gravity racing state symbol for Ohio” is based on its:

* Historic recognition and significance in Ohio.
* Continual gravity racing tradition at Derby Downs in Akron, Ohio.
* Impact on the more than one million youth worldwide who have participated in the Soap Box Derby.

Since the summer of 1933, the Soap Box Derby has impacted the lives of over one million youth who have participated in this gravity racing program.

The Soap Box Derby grew out of a photographic assignment by Myron Scott, a newsman in Dayton, Ohio. In the summer of 1933, he came across a group of boys racing their homemade cars. Scott was so impressed that he acquired a copyright to Soap Box Derby and worked to establish a national program.

In 1934, during the Great Depression, the first Soap Box Derby Race was held in Dayton, Ohio. Three hundred sixty-two youth competed in this race. Over 40,000 people attended and cheered for these competitors. Eleven year old Bob Turner of Muncie, Indiana, was the Soap Box Derby’s first Champion.

In 1935, the Soap Box Derby race was moved to Akron, Ohio, because of its central location and hilly terrain. The first Akron area race was run on Tallmadge Avenue. In 1936, Akron civic leaders including legendary journalist, John S. Knight recognized the need for a permanent track site for the youth gravity racing classic. These civic leaders worked with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to construct a Soap Box Derby track at Derby Downs in the southeast section of Akron.

This historic Derby Downs continues to be the site where the All-American Soap Box Derby Championship Race is held annually in Akron, Ohio. This race has run continuously from 1934 with the only exception occurring during World War II when no Soap Box Derby races were held.  After this four-year hiatus, the All-American Soap Box Derby resumed in Akron in 1946, and it has been held at Derby Downs every year since.

Today the Soap Box Derby continues to serve youth worldwide through its strong gravity racing tradition and STEM education programs. In 2018, more than 1300 races were held in local communities across the United States and worldwide where youth raced their gravity-powered cars. Educators and students are also utilizing the Soap Box Derby’s gravity-powered, STEM driven programs in their classrooms, enrichment, afterschool, and summer programs.

The Soap Box Derby’s Ohio historic recognition and significance, its continual gravity racing tradition, and impact on the lives of youth worldwide are the reasons we are seeking that the Soap Box Derby be recognized as the “gravity racing state symbol for Ohio”.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to provide this testimony to your Committee.

Please let me know if there are any questions or need of additional information.

Sincerely,

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