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Chairman Baldrige, Vice Chairman McClain, Ranking Member Sheehy, and members of the Transportation and Public Safety Committee, thank you so much for the opportunity to testify on behalf of House Bill 576, which would designate a portion of State Route 315, extending from King Avenue to Broad Street, the “Jesse Owens Memorial Highway.” Jesse Owens shattered world and Olympic records in track and field and destroyed the Nazi myth of Aryan supremacy. The Jesse Owens Memorial Highway would illustrate the connection between the Jesse Owens Memorial Stadium at Ohio State University and his home on the west side of Columbus, where he lived while attending the university.

His four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics broke down racial stereotypes globally, yet he continued to face racial discrimination at home. Although he was a world-class student athlete, he was not permitted to live on campus while attending Ohio State because the university did not have housing for African American students. After his Olympic success, he continued to face discrimination and did not enjoy the benefits of his stardom as today’s modern athletes and trailblazers.

He eventually withdrew from Ohio State, and thirty-two years later, the University awarded him an honorary doctorate of athletic arts for his “unparalleled skill and ability” as an athlete and for his “personification of sportsmanship ideals.” In 1976, he was awarded the Medal of Freedom.

He spent the rest of his life in a variety of ways from running several businesses, to raising a family, to promoting the Olympics, to volunteering his time as an advocate for children.

The state of Alabama has a Jesse Owens Parkway, which is a portion of State Highway 36 in Lawrence County, Alabama. Owens was born in Alabama before moving to Ohio at the age of eight, like more than six million African Americans who moved from the American South to the Northern, Midwestern, and Western states in the Great Migration.

Despite the discrimination that Jesse Owens faced in the United States and abroad, his strength and perseverance continues to inspire people all around the world. The highway will be a testament to a great American who served his city, state, and country on and off the track, even in the face of discrimination and hardship. It will serve as a constant reminder of his achievements, the challenges he faced, and serve as an inspiration for future generations.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on HB 576 to honor Jesse Owens. I would be happy to answer any questions from committee members at this time.