

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the Finance Committee, I am the executive director of Adaptive Sports Ohio and I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 33.

It has been our privilege to work with the Ohio Legislature during the last four budget cycles to promote change and provide interscholastic wheelchair basketball to students with physical disabilities. Starting as just an idea in 2015, we moved from a pilot program with one team to a league including eight school districts (Austintown, Jackson, Tallmadge, Wooster, Massillon, Plain, Wadsworth and Beavercreek). For the next school year, we have five new districts committed (Cleveland Metro, Newark, Boardman, Centerville and North Canton). We also have three additional districts that have pending agreements. With the new districts that are onboarding, we will double the size of our interscholastic wheelchair basketball league during the 2023-2024 school year.

Fueled by the support our organization received from the State, we are accomplishing what we've set out to do: work alongside school districts to create opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in sport and improve their social, emotional, physical and academic outcomes. This program is successful and I am proud to have two athletes with me here today who will share the benefits they've experienced. Ryan Hannan was our first Ohio interscholastic wheelchair basketball athlete. He has been playing for eight years on the Wooster Generals Wheelchair Basketball Team, and is a five-time state champion. Abby LaPole has been a member of the Jackson Polar Bears Wheelchair Basketball Team since its inception in 2019, and is also a seated track athlete at her school. I am so blessed to have met Ryan and Abby through this opportunity, and to watch them play basketball and succeed on and off the court. Every student, just like Ryan and Abby, deserves the opportunity to play school sports and wear their school colors. While sports are a privilege and not a right, the Rehabilitation Act insists that interscholastic activities be afforded equally to students with and without disabilities. Our program here in Ohio demonstrates that this is possible. Ryan and Abby's stories are why it is so important.

We are grateful that the Ohio Legislature has invested in this program over the last eight years. We respectfully ask for the reinstatement of the adaptive sports program ODE earmark in the FY24-25 budget with an increase to support our program growth. With funding set aside for interscholastic extracurriculars in the sports gaming bill, there is an opportunity to support this important program through that revenue. Thank you all for your consideration and I am happy to answer any questions at this time.