March 24, 2026

The Honorable Matt Huffman
Speaker, Ohio House of Representatives
77 S. High Street, 14th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Re: Substitute House Bill 1

Dear Speaker Huffman:

The undersigned Ohio-based professional sports teams and organizations respectfully request the House Public Safety Committee consider an amendment to Substitute House Bill 1 that would provide an exception for law-abiding, taxpaying, non-citizen athletes, family members and staff here legally as Visa holders to own property or a business in Ohio.

The Ohio Secretary of State's Office currently lists the following countries as foreign adversaries: The People's Republic of China, including the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the Macau Special Administrative Region (China); Republic of Cuba (Cuba); Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran); Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea); Russian Federation (Russia); and Venezuelan politician Nicolás Maduro (Maduro Regime).

Substitute House Bill 1 would prevent professional athletes and staff legally in Ohio under P-1A and P-1S Visas from owning protected property. Protected property includes agricultural land, real property within a 10-mile radius of a military installation, or real property within a 10-mile radius of a critical infrastructure facility as defined in ORC 2911.21. The latter is an exhaustive list of types of infrastructure located in areas throughout Ohio, especially in urban counties where our teams are based. It would also prevent these individuals from controlling or owning a business.

As you can see from the detailed summary attached, it is a rigorous process with the federal government that our teams and these foreign nationals must go through in order to obtain the visa. Communities throughout Ohio take significant pride in our sports teams. Our players and staff also take pride in representing Ohioans and being active members of their local communities. One way players and staff integrate is through the purchase of a home.

Thank you for your consideration of our request for our players and staff. We encourage you to amend Substitute House Bill 1 to reflect these well-vetted, taxpaying, law-abiding Visa holders.

Sincerely,

Phil Castellini
President & CEO
Cincinnati Reds

Michael A. Priest
President
Columbus Blue Jackets

Nic Barlage
CEO
Cleveland Cavaliers

Jeff Berding
President & Co- CEO
FC Cincinnati

Mary Shepro
President of Business Operations
Columbus Crew

Neil Weiss
Executive Vice President, CIO, Government Affairs & Economic Development
Cleveland Guardians

cc: Rep. Angela King
Rep. Roy Klopfenstein
Rep. Cindy Abrams, Chair, House Public Safety Committee

1. Eligibility for P-1 Visa

The type of Visa that professional athletes most likely use to participate in athletics for compensation in the United States is referred to as a P-1A Visa. In order to be eligible for a P-1A Visa, all of the following criteria must be met, depending upon the type of individual:

Professional Athletes

- The individual must be coming to the United States to be employed as an athlete by:
    - A team that is a member of an association of six or more professional sports teams whose total combined revenues exceed $10 million per year. The association must govern the conduct of its members and regulate the contests and exhibitions in which its member teams regularly engage; or
    - Any minor league team that is affiliated with such an association.

2. Submission of Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker, Form I-129

If these requirements can be met by the individual, the individual's U.S. employer, agent, or sponsor must file Form I-129, Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker, on behalf of the individual and submit the appropriate fee and supporting documentation. In that regard, the individual's employer, agent, or sponsor, must submit all of the following required evidence to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) with the Form I-129:

- A written consultation from an appropriate labor organization (i.e. Major League Baseball Players' Association, Major League Soccer Players' Association, National Basketball Players' Association, National Hockey Players' Association, etc.). The consultation must describe the work or services to be performed in the United States and the individual's qualifications for such work. The labor organization may also submit a letter stating they do not object to the petition being approved;

- Copies of any written contracts or summaries of the terms of oral agreements containing the terms of the individual's employment;

- An explanation of the nature of the events or activities, the beginning and ending dates for the events or activities, and a copy of any itinerary for the events or activities; and

- Any additional documents required for the individual's specific P-1A category below.
    - For Professional Athletes
        - Evidence that establishes that:
            - The individual will be working for a team located in the United States that is a member of an association of six or more professional sports teams. This may include but is not limited to:

    - A list of approved participating teams prepared by the association or league;
    - Contracts, agreements or other documentation showing that the team is a member of the association or league;
    - Letter from the association or league detailing and confirming the team's membership;
    - Articles, reviews or other documentation from established sports media outlets or sports media personnel showing the team is a member of a qualified league or association; or
    - Marketing and promotional material of the association or league that identifies its member teams.
- The total combined revenues of the association's teams exceeds $10 million per year. This may include but is not limited to:
    - Tax documents;
    - Audited financial documents; or
    - Articles or reports in established media outlets that specifically reference revenues generated by teams in the association or league.

- The association governs the conduct of its members and regulates the contests and exhibitions in which its member teams regularly engage. This may include but is not limited to:
    - Association or league rules and bylaws;
    - Articles or reports in established media outlets that specifically discuss action taken by the association or league to regulate the contests and exhibitions; or
    - Statements from association or league officials who have the knowledge and authority to confirm the manner and extent to which the association or league regulates the contests and exhibitions.

In addition to the above evidence in support of an individual's ***eligibility*** for the P-1 Visa, the Form I-129 also requires the following information regarding the individual's identity, background, and employment in the United States, all of which must be certified by both the individual and the individual's U.S. employer, agent, or sponsor:

- The individual's full name, other names used, date of birth, Alien Registration Number, country of birth, country of citizenship, and residential address in the U.S. (if applicable); and

- The individual's job title, LCA or ETA case number, address(es) where the individual will work, hours of work, compensation, date of intended employment, and type of business.

3. Submission of Non-Immigrant Visa Application, Form DS-160

Once the USCIS receives the Form I-129, the U.S. employer, agent, or sponsor will receive notice of the USCIS's decision on a Form I-797, Notice of Action. If the Notice of Action approves the petition, then the individual may proceed with completing and submitting the Non-Immigrant Visa Application, Form DS-160, which requires the following information:

- All names as listed on the individuals passport, all given names, and all other names used;
- Sex and Marital status;
- Date and place of birth;
- Country or region of origin, permanent residencies, national identification number(s), or social security number, if applicable;
- Purpose of trip to the U.S., travel plans, length of stay, address where the individual will be staying, contact information for person paying for the trip, any travel companions, previous U.S. travel (including previous Visas);
- Individual's home and mailing addresses, all phone numbers and email addresses used in the last 5 years, and all social media accounts and including usernames/handles used;
- Passport information, including issuance and expiration dates and issuing country;
- Individual's United States point of contact information, including names and addresses;
- Names, birth dates, and contact information of individual's mother, father, and any other relatives who are in the United States;
- Name, birth date, and contact information of individual's current spouse;
- Work, Education, and Training history, including jobs held, institutions attended, organizations affiliated with, specialized skills, and military involvement;
- Mental and physical health issues, including drug abuse or addiction;
- Criminal history, including acts of drug trafficking, human trafficking, terrorism, and/or espionage;
- History of deportation; and
- Submission of a photograph.

It is worth noting that these athletes and staff, in addition to the above, are subject to extensive federal vetting for criminal history and espionage to ensure public safety. The I-129 application process goes through **USCIS**, the DS-160/visa process goes through **U.S. Dept. of State/consular services**, and even with all of these things arranged in advance, each person is still cleared at the time of **every** entry by **Dept. of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Protection**.

4. Interview and Medical Examination

After submission of the DS-160, typically an interview will be scheduled at the U.S. embassy or consulate in the country where the individual submits the application during which an official will evaluate the individual's application, ask questions regarding the individual's qualifications for the application, and review the required documents. The documents that individuals are required to bring to this interview vary from country to country but can include:

- Passport;
- DS-160 Confirmation Page;
- Interview Confirmation letters;
- Birth Certificate;
- Marriage and Divorce Certificates;
- Immunization and Medical History Records;
- Identity Cards;
- Court and Criminal Records; and
- Military Records.

The individual will also be required to undergo a medical examination by an approved doctor prior to the individual's interview.

If the DS-160 Application is approved, the Visa will be placed on the individual's passport and the passport will be returned to the individual.

5. Length of P-1 Visas

Players who are granted P-1A Visas may stay in the United States for the time needed to complete the event, competition, or performance, for an initial five-year period with the opportunity for a five-year extension. After that period of time, they must leave the country and then apply for a new, five-year initial stay and so on. Staff visas, P-1S, are typically issued for one year if the staff member is outside the country at the time of adjudication or it is a staff member's first P-1S application. These P-1S visas can also extend in five-year increments. Individuals may also apply for a green card if circumstances change while the individual is living in the United States regarding green card eligibility.