

## Opening Statement

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

It is truly an honor for a Mayor representing the largest City in Western Kentucky to speak today in support of H.R. 1276, which removes restrictions from a parcel of land in Paducah, Kentucky, introduced by Congressman James Comer. Since 2013, this property has been the home of the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club. This land was conveyed to the City of Paducah by the National Park Service, through the Federal Lands to Parks Program, in 2012, with a restriction that will impede the positive changes and improvements that need to be made at the Boys and Girls Club.

Boys & Girls Clubs of America serve over 3 million young people through 5400 clubs nationwide. On any given day 350,000 kids and teens attend a boys & Girls Club. The work they do helping kids who need the opportunity to make something of themselves and for many to become leaders is truly legendary. And they do it the right way, through a variety of resources relying primarily on private contributions and community leadership.

The Oscar Cross club itself serves hundreds of children each year through after-school and summer programs. However, the current facility has reached its limits, and it is unable to accommodate the growing demand for its services. In 2024, the club had 258 members but could only accommodate 120 children at a time, leading to a waitlist of over 100 youth at times. The Board of Directors and community partners are eager to expand the facilities to meet growing demand. However, the city's ownership of the building with federal restrictions is a massive barrier to making that investment a reality.

A larger facility would mean that the Boys and Girls Club would be able to increase capacity, develop innovative programs, renovate existing spaces, and build stronger relationships with local schools, businesses, and organizations. The Club has a long history of adapting to meet the needs of our community, but space and resources have been ongoing challenges.

Oscar Cross founded the Boys and Girls Club in his own home in 1949, and it was chartered nationally in 1953. Cross's visionary leadership led to the formation of one of the first desegregated board of directors, helping to lead the integration of Black youth into Boys and Girls Clubs across the country. Oscar Cross, a civic leader and the first Black juvenile officer in McCracken County, dedicated fifty years to the Club, transforming it into a vital community resource. His efforts were recognized with numerous awards, including the Boys and Girls Club Herman Prescott Award for promoting equality. The club was renamed in his honor in 1980 and continues to empower young people, fostering academic achievement, good character, and citizenship.

Since 2013, the Club has been located at 2956 Park Avenue, thanks to a partnership with the City of Paducah, whereby the City I lead, leases the location to the Oscar Cross Club. This location has successfully increased visibility and support for the Club. I have been a long-term supporter and advocate for the Club during my time as Mayor of Paducah and when I served 20 years on its board of directors prior to my first election. As a board member and chief advisor, I helped raise money and lead the move to this location.

This Club has been a beacon of hope and growth for children in our community, providing a safe and nurturing environment where kids can learn, grow, and thrive. With the passage of this legislation, we have the opportunity to expand our facility and continue its long legacy of serving Paducah's children at the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club. We have a \$1M grant from the State of Kentucky waiting and a long list of donors eager to provide funding to be used for the much-needed renovation.

I want to thank Congressman Comer for introducing this bill, Senator Paul for introducing the companion Senate bill, and Senator McConnell for being an original cosponsor. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the opportunity to voice my strong support for the passage of H.R. 1276 and I'm happy to take any questions.