



**AMERICAN COLLEGIATE SOCIETY FOR ADAPTED ATHLETICS
(ACSAA)
P.O. BOX 399
KECHI, KS 67067**

March 8, 2016

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SB 470, an act establishing the intercollegiate adaptive sport grant program.

In 2009, I embarked on a journey to create American Collegiate Society for Adapted Athletics, an organization which now, almost seven years later, works with all thirteen intercollegiate wheelchair basketball programs and the roughly half a dozen intercollegiate wheelchair tennis programs in the United States on a daily basis. I started the organization as a 14-year old high school freshman and now oversee its daily operations while also attending college full time.

I started my organization to provide more opportunities for physically challenged college students to compete in sport through their university and to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle while earning a degree. We have been successful, but there is much more to do; thus, my support of this legislation.

A recent study by Dr. Michael Cottingham at The University of Houston linked intercollegiate adaptive sport athletes to higher graduation rates, employment, and economic success than those with disabilities who were not able to partake. I trust that research and think we should bring its benefits to Kansas. This legislation in my mind empowers students with disabilities to access academic programs, maintain a healthy and active lifestyle, build leadership and teamwork skills, earn a degree and live an independent, socially productive life.

Without wheelchair basketball, I'm not sure where some of my friends would be right now. Orlando was born in Venezuela to a well-off family. His father was a Senator in the Venezuelan government. A hostile opposition coalition took control of the government and targeted children of government leaders. Orlando was shot and left to die. He persevered, survived, and moved to Miami for access to better treatment and rehabilitation care. He found himself soon engaged with The Miami Heat Wheels community wheelchair basketball team and was offered a scholarship to the University of Texas-Arlington a couple of years later. Orlando is now close to earning his degree and starting a new, independent life for himself because of intercollegiate wheelchair basketball.

Matt Bollig was an all-star athlete in multiple sports. A Kansas native, he was a quarterback at Ottawa University when he was injured in a weightlifting accident and confined to a wheelchair. Matt, who had participated in sports his whole life, soon joined programs through Kansas Accessible Sports and is continuing his

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academic pursuits while playing wheelchair basketball for The University of Missouri. Other friends of mine were born with their disabilities. Some were in car accidents and paralyzed as a result. None of them dreamed of being Paralympic athletes, but I know more than a dozen- all because of intercollegiate adaptive sports.

This bill would give Kansas students with disabilities the same chance for success that Orlando, Matt and hundreds of others have had. It would give the hundreds of talented young wheelchair athletes who are not part of a current program the chance to come to Kansas and live out their dreams while taking advantage of one of our state's tremendous academic programs. We don't have those opportunities yet and many of us -like Matt Bollig- are leaving the state as a result. The bill also appeals to the generosity of Kansans, allowing residents of our state to work in conjunction with the State and the Board of Regents to create this much-needed opportunity through a contribution of funds toward the program.

Thank you for hearing this bill today. I urge all committee members to support the legislation for passage so that we can continue to progress on the road to empowering independence for people with disabilities.

Respectfully submitted,

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