



OLBCF: BLACK PAPERS

Policy Brief

Theme: Economics, Community Development

Bill/Policy: “Enact the Fit, Safe, and Strong Communities Act,” House Bill 328

Status: Referred to the Finance Committee

Date: May 2026 | **Lead:** Yassah Tommy

THE QUICK CLIP

“Enact the Fit, Safe, and Strong Communities Act” (House Bill 328) establishes a grant program for fiscal years (FY) 2026 and 2027 that provides reimbursement to local government entities (township, county, village, city, etc.) of up to 75% for developing, renewing, or acquiring outdoor spaces, parks, playgrounds, pools, splash pads, and recreation centers. HB 328 aims to increase access to these spaces to positively affect the physical, mental, and social well-being and safety of Ohio’s communities. ¹

THE STATE HOUSE BREAKDOWN

- **Current Status:** [Referred to the Finance Committee on 6/11/25](#)
- **Before HB 328:** Ohio currently provides various grants and programs to support community spaces, including outdoor areas, parks, and recreation centers. These include programs such as the Community Development Block Grant and the NatureWorks Grant. The Community Development Block Grant is a state initiative using federal funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to fund public facilities and affordable housing.² The NatureWorks Grant, similar to the one proposed in HB 328, offers reimbursements of up to 75% to local governments for acquiring, renovating, or developing community spaces, with a maximum award of \$150,000.³ Unlike existing grants that focus on creating public spaces like parks or recreation centers, the HB 328 grant aims not only to create such spaces but also to promote learning, wellness, activity, and computer literacy for all Ohioans, making a tangible impact.
- **After HB 328:** The “Enact the Fit, Safe and Strong Communities Act,” HB 328, would establish a grant program that reimburses towns, villages, counties, and cities (local government entities) up to 75% to acquire, renovate, or develop outdoor spaces, parks, playgrounds, pools, and recreation centers. The bill proposes allocating \$10 million from the General Revenue Fund for fiscal years (FY) 2026 and 2027 for these projects, and an additional \$250,000 to create "learning labs." These labs are dedicated spaces within community areas designed for educational activities, skill development, health promotion, wellness education, and accessible technology training for community members. To apply for this grant, local government entities must have the title to or a nonrevocable lease for their property for at least 15 years, a detailed plan outlining the proposed development or renovation of the property, and a plan to work with a nonprofit organization or community partner in the property's development. ⁴
- **The “Why”:** OLBCF met with Representative Brewer (D) to discuss the Enact the Fresh, Safe, and Fit Community Act, HB 328. The representative emphasized the urgent need for safe, accessible, and high-quality community spaces for all Ohioans, especially children and families. During the meeting, Representative Brewer highlighted that parks, recreation

centers, and green spaces are essential investments that strengthen physical health, support mental well-being, foster social connection, and contribute to stronger local economies and healthier communities overall. With Ohio currently ranking 43rd in the nation for health outcomes, the importance of equitable access to outdoor and green spaces has become increasingly clear, particularly as wealthier neighborhoods continue to have greater access to these resources while many low-income and Black and Brown communities remain underserved.⁵ HB 328 represents an important step toward addressing these disparities by expanding access to safe, inclusive, and enriching community environments that provide critical physical, mental, and social benefits for children, elders, and communities across Ohio.

THE IMPACT ON OHIOANS

How this could affect our families, friends, and community.

- **Economic & Social Stakes:** Community spaces provide a multitude of benefits for the communities they reside in. These facilities serve residents of all ages by offering more opportunities for physical activity that supports both physical and mental health. Studies indicate that easy access to parks and green spaces correlates with higher physical activity among children, helping reduce risks such as obesity and promoting overall growth and health.⁶ Outdoor recreation and activities are linked to better mental health, including reduced stress and fewer symptoms of depression and attention-related disorders.⁷ In addition to health benefits, these community centers often host organized programs—such as food and nutrition classes, outdoor adventures like hiking and biking, and sports and camps—that strengthen community bonds and encourage ongoing participation for all.⁸

Investing in community spaces such as parks and recreation systems has a significant economic impact, serving as a major driver of local and national economies. According to the National Recreation and Park Association, local parks and recreation generated \$201 billion in economic activity and supported 1.1 million jobs in 2021.⁹ Parks and recreation are not only public amenities but also essential infrastructure that contributes to employment, income generation, and overall economic productivity.¹⁰ By supporting large-scale economic activity and sustaining a substantial workforce, parks and recreation systems play a direct role in strengthening local economies and reinforcing their long-term stability and growth.

- **The Disparity:** In the United States, parks, outdoor spaces, and recreation spaces are less equitable and safe in Black communities.¹¹ Research has found that despite having more locational access to parks and recreation spaces, Black communities experience poorer park quality: frequent acts of graffiti and vandalism, drug use and smoking, and theft and violent crimes in these spaces, all of which contribute to low community use of these spaces.¹² As a result, Black communities are more likely to miss the physical, mental, and social health benefits associated with well-maintained public spaces. The initiatives in HB 328, which support the revitalization, development, and long-term investment in community recreation spaces, have the potential to significantly improve health outcomes and overall quality of life in Black communities by expanding access to safe, welcoming, and functional environments.
- **Real Life Implications:** Passing HB 328 would enhance and expand community spaces throughout Ohio. This could lead to new job opportunities and increased access to digital literacy programs at local recreation centers and other venues. Families, particularly those with children, would gain safe, welcoming places to play, learn, and relax. Learning labs would focus on wellness and teach vital life skills. Overall, the approval of HB 328 would notably benefit Ohioans from various backgrounds, especially those who currently lack access to parks, pools, outdoor spaces, and recreational facilities in their neighborhoods.

ANALYSIS & REFLECTION

- **Lack of Progress:** As of May 2026, HB 328 sits in the House Finance Committee, but has not undergone any committee hearings. Bills can stall for numerous reasons during the legislative process, often tied to how fiscal priorities are assessed within the state budget. In a meeting with Representative Brewer (D), when asked about the bill's lack of progress, he cited its financial aspect and the prioritization of certain projects and initiatives, such as sports arenas, over other economic and well-being initiatives targeted towards Ohioans.

HB 328 designates \$10.25 million from the Ohio General Revenue Fund for both FY 2026 and FY 2027.¹³ Meanwhile, General Revenue appropriations for FY 2026 and FY 2027 are \$46.9 billion and \$48.4 billion, respectively.¹⁴ The renewal, acquisition, and development of community spaces for Ohioans under HB 328 constitutes only 0.02% of the General Revenue Fund for fiscal years 2026 and 2027, representing a small proportion of the budget for a project that would help the 11.9 million people who reside in Ohio.¹⁵ Ohioans need spaces that promote a healthy, safe way of life, especially given that Ohio ranks 43rd among states in health outcomes.¹⁶

Ohio continues to allocate substantial funds and prioritize major economic development initiatives, which receive more attention than projects like HB 328. For instance, approximately \$600 million has been allocated to renovate the Cleveland Browns stadium to attract businesses, corporations, and workers to both the stadium and the city of Cleveland.¹⁷ The state prefers to spend significantly more—about 30 times as much—on stadiums and arenas than on community infrastructure. Such community spaces boost the economy and provide physical, mental, and social benefits to Ohio residents, enhancing the quality of life for Ohioans of all walks of life, especially those who are disadvantaged in health, such as low-income, Black, and Brown communities.

The slow progress on bills, initiatives, and projects like the Enact the Fit, Safe, and Strong Communities Act, HB 328, highlights the disconnect between fiscal and social priorities and the needs of Black and underserved Ohio communities. Ohio's allocation of \$600 million to a stadium, while HB 328, constituting only 0.02% of the state budget, remains without a committee hearing, raises critical questions about which communities the state is truly investing in.

DIRECT ACTION: THE PROACTIVE RESPONSE

How to move from reacting to leading.

- **Immediate Action:** Contact your local representative to seek their support for HB 328
- **Community Action:** Share this brief with your neighbors, co-workers, family members, and community organizations and nonprofit groups involved in urban planning and development.
- **Deep Dive:** Watch committee hearings on [The Ohio Channel](#) and consider submitting written or in-person testimony to the House Finance Committee. OLBCF can help community members prepare testimonies.

References

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- ⁸ Urban Institute. “The Health Benefits of Parks and Their Economic Impacts: A Review of the Literature.” ; National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). “Parks and Recreation Is Essential.” ; Cohen, Mychal, Kimberly Burrowes, and Peace Gwam. “The Health Benefits of Parks and Their Economic Impacts.”
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- ¹⁰ National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). “Parks and Recreation Is Essential.”
- ¹¹ Active Living Research, *Neighborhood Race, Poverty, and Access to Parks and Green Space*, <https://www.activelivingresearch.org/neighborhood-race-poverty-and-access-parks-and-green-space>. U.S. Forest Service, *Unequal Access to Social, Environmental and Health Amenities in U.S. Urban Parks*, <https://research.fs.usda.gov/treesearch/68701>
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