



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

April Baskin

Baskin Expresses Grave Concern About Buffalo Bills' CBA Response

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Buffalo, NY - The reversal by Buffalo Bills executives on their commitment to community inclusivity regarding the implementation of the Community Benefits Agreement (“CBA”) is not at all shocking. This is what billion-dollar corporations do to even their most loyal consumers. It is clear the Bills executives are going against the intention of the CBA, which was to invest into the community, particularly disadvantaged communities, as a return on the \$850 million in public dollars used to build the new stadium.

When I first proposed a CBA for the new stadium in 2021, I anticipated challenges. I created a template, called Invest Well Erie, that laid out the need for direct funding of the most pressing needs in our community. That proposal was dismantled during the stadium negotiations, support was limited, and building public pressure to demand a stronger CBA was impossible as those at the table were required to sign a non-disclosure agreement to participate in the negotiations.

The final version of the CBA fell short of my vision. But I remained hopeful that the Community Benefits Oversight Committee would be able to push the CBA in the right direction. But now it seems that the direction is changing. Does the Bills front office “believe” in the underlying ethical principles of community inclusion and addressing the societal needs that the CBA was designed to uphold? Their statement this week that the Bills executives are in complete control of the CBA says otherwise. I knew back in 2021 when I brought forth the idea of a CBA that we would come to this day, but I pushed forward. I knew when the “Choose Love” campaign began after the racist May 14th mass shooting, the question would be “what are the tangible actions that show how we “choose love?”

Members of the Community Benefit Oversight Committee, the oversight entity for the CBA, have called for tangible actions on what choosing love looks like. The community would love for a transparent, accessible public application so they can apply for the community investment the Bills committed to WNY. The small businesses, food vendors, cleaning

companies, security firms, would love to learn how they can start preparing to work at the new stadium. But the Bills executives refuse to engage with the community to develop these programs.

Despite Bills statement earlier this week that they are fully in control of the CBA, there are requirements they must adhere to, including:

- local spend on stadium supplies
- stadium operations contracted by vendors
- inclusion of local food businesses
- youth professional sports careers programming
- public art implementation created by local artists

The announcement of the public art program is particularly concerning. The CBA required the development, with local artists, of a public art program. Instead of working with local artists to develop the program, the Bills front office hired a consultant, from Kansas City of all places, to develop the program. Last year, I pushed Bills executives for months to meet with local artists to help develop the program, but they never committed to meeting.

It is disturbing that the Buffalo Bills executives are walking back from their commitments, before the new stadium is even open. I call on the community to join me in demanding better from our local billion-dollar corporation, with the most loyal customers, to engage in this CBA to the level we are demanding the Bills front office engage with us. We will not accept loopholes, legalese, and half-hearted efforts in our CBA. And we will be here every day of the 33 years of this stadium lease to demand the best of the CBA's community investment, not the bare minimum.

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