

Sports & Esports Alert

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The Home Team Act— Proposed Federal Legislation Targeting Professional Sports Team Relocations

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Rep. Greg Casar (D-Texas) have jointly introduced the Home Team Act, a proposed bill that would essentially federalize Ohio's Art Modell Law and impose a series of conditions before a professional sports team could relocate outside its existing metropolitan area. The bill, introduced March 26, is designed to curtail the leverage that team owners currently hold when considering franchise relocations. Among its principal provisions, the bill would require team owners to provide at least one year's notice before relocating, offer the franchise for sale to local buyers at a "fair and reasonable price" determined by independent appraisers, and subject noncompliant owners to fines of \$30,000 per day.

Background: Ohio's Art Modell Law

The Home Team Act draws direct inspiration from Ohio's Modell Law, codified at Ohio Revised Code § 9.67. Named for the former Cleveland Browns owner who controversially moved the team to Baltimore in 1995, the Modell Law was enacted to prevent a similar situation from recurring. Specifically, the Modell Law prevents any Ohio professional sports team that uses tax-supported facilities and receives government "financial assistance" from playing "elsewhere"—unless the city consents or the team provides six months' notice and the opportunity for the city or local buyers to purchase the team.

The Modell Law was notably invoked in 2018 when then-Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine sued Major League Soccer (MLS) and the Columbus Crew's operator-investor—Precourt Sports Ventures—over the Crew's planned relocation to Austin, Texas. That litigation ended



via settlement when the Crew was purchased by local buyers—led by Jimmy and Dee Haslam—and Austin ultimately received an MLS expansion franchise. Rep. Casar, who was serving as an Austin city councilman at the time the Crew's potential relocation arose, noted: "The Modell Law helped keep that soccer franchise there, we got an expansion club, and it was truly a win-win. So as the Modell Law was helpful there, we now need a solution like that nationwide."

The Cleveland Browns Litigation and Legislative Resolution

The Modell Law surfaced again in the legal battles surrounding the Cleveland Browns' planned relocation to Brook Park, Ohio. In late 2024, Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb invoked the Modell Law to block the Browns' owners—Haslam Sports Group—from moving the team, arguing that they had not provided the opportunity for anyone else to purchase the team as required by statute. The Browns responded by filing a federal lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the Modell Law, and the city of Cleveland filed its own enforcement action in Ohio state court.

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The dispute was effectively mooted by a legislative maneuver. In June 2025, Ohio lawmakers inserted into the state budget a last-minute amendment that narrowed the Modell Law so that it applies only to teams that intend to leave the state of Ohio entirely rather than to make an intrastate move. With the law thus amended, in October 2025 the city of Cleveland and Haslam Sports Group reached a roughly \$100 million settlement, under which Cleveland agreed to stop fighting the team's move, in exchange for cash payments and a commitment from the Haslams to demolish the existing stadium. The Cleveland City Council approved the settlement in December 2025, and contractors have already begun work on the future stadium site in Brook Park.

The Chicago Bears and Indiana

The most prominent catalyst for the Home Team Act is the Chicago Bears' ongoing consideration of a move to Hammond, Indiana. The Bears have been pressing Illinois state lawmakers to pass a bill providing property tax breaks to large-scale building projects, including the new stadium the team has been pursuing in Arlington Heights. Without the tax incentives, the team owners are looking to move the team to Hammond. The Indiana state government has compounded the situation by working to approve the use of state funds to help the Bears build a new stadium.

If the Home Team Act were to pass, the Bears' owners would be required to provide one year of notice before proceeding with a relocation to Hammond and to make the franchise available for purchase by prospective local buyers during that period. A move by the Bears to the Chicago suburb of Arlington Heights would not trigger the bill's requirements, given the suburb's proximity within the same metropolitan area.

Key Provisions of the Home Team Act

The Home Team Act contains several core mechanisms designed to slow the relocation process and provide communities with meaningful opportunities to retain their professional sports teams.

One-Year Notice Requirement. The bill mandates that team owners provide a minimum of one year's notice before moving a team to a new community. A "move" is defined as crossing state lines or relocating to a new metropolitan statistical area. This required period is longer

than the Modell Law's six-month notice period and is intended to reduce the negotiating leverage that team owners can gain by initiating relocation discussions on short timelines.

Right of First Refusal for Local Buyers. During the one-year notice period, the franchise must be made available for purchase by prospective local buyers at a fair and reasonable price, as determined by a team of independent appraisers. Eligible purchasers include community ownership groups modeled on the Green Bay Packers; government entities; nonprofits; public-private partnerships; or private persons, groups or companies. However, the owner is not forced to sell. Rather, the owner must make the team available at a fair price and, if no buyer meets that price, may proceed with the relocation.

Penalties for Noncompliance. The bill imposes fines of \$30,000 per day on franchise owners who fail to comply with the notice and purchase-opportunity requirements.

Applicability. The Home Team Act applies only to professional sports teams located in the United States. Canadian teams that play in U.S.-based leagues, such as the Toronto Blue Jays or the Toronto Raptors, would not be covered.

How the Bill Would Deter Relocations

The Home Team Act addresses a recurring dynamic in relocation disputes: the compressed timelines that can accompany a team's consideration of a move to a new market. Under current practice, relocation discussions can unfold rapidly, leaving local officials with limited time to evaluate their options, explore alternative financing arrangements or identify prospective local ownership groups. The bill seeks to create a more measured process in two ways.

First, the one-year notice requirement extends the timeline and gives local governments a meaningful window in which to assess the situation and explore alternative financing arrangements. Second, by requiring the team to be made available for purchase, the bill opens the door for local billionaires, investor consortiums or community ownership models to step in and keep the team in its home market. The use of independent appraisers to determine a fair and reasonable price prevents an owner from setting an artificially inflated asking price designed to deter buyers.

Limitations of the Bill

While the Home Team Act represents a significant development, it is important to understand what the bill does not do.

The bill does not prohibit relocations outright. If no buyer emerges during the one-year notice period or if no buyer is willing to meet the appraiser-determined fair price, the team's owners remain free to proceed with the move. The bill creates procedural hurdles and a right of first refusal, but it does not grant any entity a veto over a relocation.

The bill does not address the practical challenge of affordability. Professional sports franchises in leagues such as the National Football League and the National Basketball Association routinely sell for billions of dollars. Assembling a local ownership group or a community-based entity capable of meeting that price is an enormous undertaking that may not be feasible in every market. While the Green Bay Packers model of community ownership is cited approvingly in the bill, replicating that model at today's franchise valuations presents significant practical obstacles.

The bill does not cover intrametropolitan relocations. Moves within the same metropolitan statistical area—such as the Browns' relocation from Cleveland to Brook Park or a potential Bears move to the Chicago suburb of Arlington Heights—would not trigger the bill's requirements.

The bill does not address stadium subsidies directly. While the bill's sponsors have spoken at length about the problem of public subsidies for private stadiums, the Home Team Act does not restrict or regulate the use of public funds for stadium construction.

The bill currently has limited bipartisan support. The Home Team Act was introduced as a Democratic initiative, with co-sponsors including Rep. Jesús "Chuy" García (D-Ill.), Rep. Lateefah Simon (D-Calif.), Rep. Chris DeLuzio (D-Penn.), Rep. Sylvia Garcia (D-Texas) and Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.). While Rep. Casar has expressed that "significant interest" exists in the Illinois congressional delegation and that the bill would ultimately attract bipartisan support, the legislation faces an uncertain path in a deeply divided Congress.

What To Watch

We will continue to monitor the Home Team Act as it moves through the legislative process. Clients with interests in professional sports team ownership, stadium development or municipal financing should be aware that this bill, if enacted, would meaningfully alter the dynamics of franchise relocation negotiations. Even if the bill does not pass in its current form, its introduction signals a growing political appetite at both the state and federal levels for regulating the terms under which professional sports teams may leave their home communities.

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