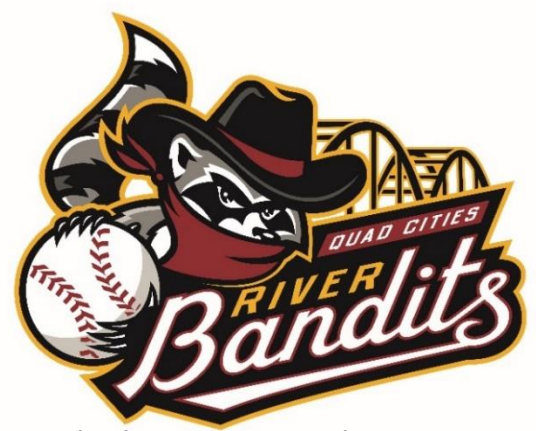


December 6, 2019

Hon. Charles Grassley
The United States Senate
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510



Dear Senator Grassley,

Thank you so much for taking time to meet with me on Wednesday of this week. The announcement by Major League Baseball (MLB), as reported in *The New York Times*, that it proposes to eliminate its affiliation with 42 Minor League baseball teams, including three in our great state of Iowa, has upset baseball fans throughout Eastern Iowa. I know I speak for my colleagues in Burlington and Clinton as well when I say how much we appreciate your strong advocacy on our behalf.

MLB would tell you that these teams are not being eliminated per se, they are merely being denied an affiliation with any major league club, and that these teams could potentially exist in some sort of "Dream League." This is, quite frankly, not in any way realistic or possible. If the Burlington, Clinton and Quad Cities clubs were forced out of the affiliated Midwest League, where each of us has played for nearly 60 years, and into this so-called Dream League, who would we play? The nearest Minor League team to any of us also being lumped into this "Dream League" is located more than 500 miles from Davenport. The sad reality is that if MLB is allowed to impose its radical plan to contract 42 affiliated Minor League Baseball (MiLB) teams, each of the Iowa clubs would likely disappear forever.

The impact of losing teams in small and mid-size communities such as the Quad Cities would be, in a word, catastrophic. Certainly, losing the River Bandits, which I own in partnership with your good friend and supporter, Iowa State Senator Roby Smith, would be devastating to the Quad Cities. For starters, we employ more than two dozen full-time people and two hundred part-time people, all of whom would lose their jobs. That's at least 225 jobs, gone; 225 people out of work. We also offer paid internships to a dozen area college students, giving them relevant real-world experience in the business of sports.

But that's just the beginning. Our club accounts for more than a thousand hotel nights each summer in Davenport and Bettendorf. Many other area businesses, including restaurants, bars, and gas stations, also rely heavily on the Bandits attracting people to the Quad Cities throughout the Spring and Summer. All would be hit hard if the River Bandits were put out of existence by Major League Baseball.

Business owners throughout the Quad Cities use our ballpark both as an affordable and impactful marketing vehicle for their companies and a great way to entertain both clients and customers throughout the Spring and Summer months. The Bandits return their support by purchasing more than one million dollars' worth of goods and services from area companies, which supports Eastern Iowa's economy.

Additionally, many cities, including Davenport, have invested millions of taxpayer dollars in their ballparks; many, including Davenport, still are paying down an outstanding bond obligation on their ballpark. Those bonds, of course, were financed with taxpayer dollars. If we were contracted, it would be impossible for Davenport – and for nearly all of these cities – to meet their bond obligations.

Finally, the River Bandits play a vital role in the charitable work done in the Quad Cities. All totaled, the River Bandits contributed more than \$600,000 last year alone to local groups and charities – and more than \$1 million in just the past two years! If we were wiped out under MLB's plan to contract 42 teams, the Quad Cities would never be able to make up the significant impact we have on charitable giving. For example, despite playing in one of Minor League Baseball's smaller markets, we fund annually the largest MiLB college scholarship foundation in the nation. Each year, the River Bandits pay the entire tuition for four area students to attend each of four local institutions of higher learning, St. Ambrose University, Scott County Community College, and Augustana College. Taken together, those tuition costs exceed \$80,000 a year. No MiLB team in the country spends more to educate students in their area.

In addition, each of the past two years the River Bandits have donated \$100,000 in cash to Genesis Health System to help pay for free flu shots for every child in the Quad Cities, Camp Genesis, for families dealing with cancer, and for the Genesis Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit, the only one of its kind in our community. This year the River Bandits partnered with Genesis to raise \$101,000 to help those families and businesses devastated by this spring's horrible floods. In fact, *Ballpark Digest* just named the Quad Cities River Bandits the winner of its "Commitment to Charity Award," the third time in the past five years we have earned that coveted award. Losing our team would be devastating to the charitable efforts upon which so many Clinton, Jackson, Scott, Cedar, Muscatine and Louisa county residents have come to depend.

In short, if MLB's radical plan were to go into effect, taxpayer dollars would have been wasted; local investors and numerous other stakeholders would be devastated; numerous jobs (including both players and people who work at the ballpark) would be lost; scores of area businesses would be negatively impacted; children throughout Eastern Iowa would lose the chance to enjoy America's pastime; and people throughout the Quad Cities would lose the opportunity to enjoy one of our area's best amenities – fun, affordable, family-friendly entertainment in the most picturesque ballpark setting in the nation.

What is especially frustrating about MLB's contraction plan is it says it needs to do this because too many MiLB teams have sub-par facilities or lack access to quality hotels. While I cannot speak for every team, I can assure you that the Quad Cities is simply not one of them. In fact, our ballpark, Modern Woodmen Park (voted the best Minor League Ballpark in America by *USA Today*), was one of the first three MiLB ballparks in the country to install energy-efficient LED field lights; to this day, we are one of a small minority of MiLB teams to have them. We also have two five-star hotels within half a mile of our ballpark, and many, many more quality name-brand hotels at affordable prices throughout Davenport and Bettendorf.

In the past few years, we have made many player-related improvements to our ballpark. We replaced not only our entire playing field but also the underlying irrigation system. We also refurbished the showers and carpeting in the team clubhouses (both home and visitors). In short, the Quad Cities club is in compliance with all of Minor League Baseball's facility standards – and far exceeds requirements in many categories. Moreover, if MLB seeks additional improvements to our ballpark, neither our MLB affiliate, the Houston Astros, nor MLB itself, has ever communicated them to us. If they would tell us what improvements they require, we would find a way to bring them to fruition. But to simply eliminate our team for reasons we do not even know seems especially unfair – and un-American.

If MLB really wants improved Minor League facilities, all five Minor League Baseball teams in Iowa stand ready to help – and to make whatever improvements MLB and MiLB agree upon. If MLB really wants to improve travel, MiLB has offered to realign existing teams to maximize travel efficiencies. And if MLB wants more money from the minor leagues (we currently pay them a tax on all tickets sold of about 8%), MiLB leaders are willing to discuss that, as well. But we cannot allow them to arbitrarily and capriciously eliminate 42 MiLB teams, including three in Eastern Iowa, without any clearly delineated objective ballpark facility standards or any opportunity to meet whatever standards upon which the two sides agree.

Over the years, more than 300 Minor Leaguers who called Davenport home went on to play in the Major Leagues, including four members of the Baseball Hall of Fame as well as more recent MLB stars Joe Mauer, Billy Wagner, Alex Bregman, and Carlos Correa. Like you, I would hate for the children of Eastern Iowa to lose out on the chance to see the future Major League stars of tomorrow here in Davenport today.

Thank you again for your leadership and your strong advocacy on behalf of Iowa in general and the Quad Cities in particular. Baseball is America's greatest game, America's pastime, and it belongs in Eastern Iowa. Roby Smith and I appreciate so much your efforts to fight to keep it there.

Warmest regards,



Dave Heller
Owner