CLEVELAND COUNTY

To whom it may concern,

On behalf of the Cleveland County Board of County Commissioners, we are writing to express concern regarding the decision to reschedule the University of Oklahoma versus Ole Miss football game from Saturday to Sunday. While we understand that this was an unprecedented matter as there were nationwide travel disruptions on Friday, decisions of this magnitude have significant consequences beyond the football field, particularly for the communities responsible for supporting and hosting these events.

A University of Oklahoma home football game is a major community-wide undertaking, bringing 100,000 people into our area and requiring extensive coordination among local government, law enforcement, emergency responders, healthcare providers, businesses, churches and other community partners. These organizations and individuals make substantial preparations well in advance to ensure the safety, security and overall experience of everyone attending.

Changing the day of such a wide-scale event, particularly with notice on the day of the originally scheduled event, creates considerable operational and financial challenges for these partners. Many agencies and businesses have already established staffing schedules, contracted services, coordinated resources and made financial commitments based on a Saturday event. Those arrangements cannot simply be shifted without additional costs and disruption.

While the University of Oklahoma made these points clear to SEC leadership, it is imperative as an elected official representing this community, we reiterate the following disruptions. First being public safety.

The Cleveland County Sheriff's Office and other public safety partners dedicate personnel and resources to support game-day operations, traffic management, crowd safety and emergency response. A last-minute change requires agencies to rebuild staffing schedules, reassign personnel and potentially incur overtime and other unanticipated expenses. As you are aware, this was not the only sporting event being hosted on the University of Oklahoma campus Sunday. Restaffing a stadium for a home football game is a major challenge within itself, but considering other events on campus made this an even greater burden. In addition to our first responders, hospitals and emergency medical providers coordinated staffing and resources that were disrupted.

Locally, restaurants, hotels, retailers and other local businesses prepared extensively for a Saturday football crowd. They purchased inventory, scheduled employees, coordinated deliveries and made operational decisions based on the expected volume of customers. Being notified of a change on game day left these businesses with little opportunity to adjust, resulting in potential lost revenue, wasted inventory, additional labor costs and scheduling complications. While these businesses still received support from our great community, the disruption cannot be overlooked.

Additionally, churches around the University of Oklahoma campus planned worship services, activities and staffing around the traditional Saturday game schedule. Moving the event to Sunday created significant inconvenience for congregations and disrupted services, parking arrangements and the ability of community members to gather and worship.

To be clear, these were not isolated inconveniences. They represent real financial and operational consequences for the people and organizations that make game days possible. Cleveland County is used to making changes and being flexible as we deal with severe weather events. The University of Oklahoma and local government agencies worked to make this change possible, but the disruptions should not go unnoticed. The burden of accommodating a last-minute schedule change falls disproportionately on local partners who have little to no input into the decision but are expected to absorb the resulting costs.

Cleveland County and the surrounding communities take great pride in supporting the University of Oklahoma and welcoming visitors from across the country. We recognize that circumstances may occasionally require difficult decisions. However, when those decisions effect an event of this scale, the impact on the host community must be given meaningful consideration.

We respectfully ask the Southeastern Conference to recognize the extensive local coordination required to host these events and to consider the broader community consequences when making future scheduling decisions.

Our community is proud to be part of the college football tradition, but that partnership must be built on mutual respect and an understanding that these events extend far beyond the stadium. The nearly 100,000 people who attend, along with the thousands of local employees, public servants, business owners and community members who support them, deserve consideration in decisions that directly affect their lives and livelihoods.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We hope this feedback will be taken into consideration as the SEC evaluates its scheduling and communication practices moving forward.

Sincerely,

Cleveland County Board of County Commissioners

Rusty Grissom, Chairman

Rod Cleveland, Vice-Chairman

Jacob McHughes, Member