



**Testimony of Brian Hess
Executive Director
Sports Fans Coalition**

Sports Fans Coalition is the nation’s leading fan advocacy organization. Since 2009, we have fought for fans. In 2014, we led the historic campaign to end the Federal Communications Commission’s sports blackout rule. From Congress to state capitols, Oregon to New Jersey and Maryland, we have testified in state legislatures in favor of pro-fan policies wherever public policy and sports intersect. On behalf of Maryland’s sports fans, today we are taking on the fraudulent practice of deceiving fans through so-called “white label” ticket sales websites.

White label ticket sites deceive fans who think they are buying directly from a venue box office at face value, but in reality are buying from a third party-pretending to be an official site. Often using misleading URLs, link titles, imagery, and logos, white label ticket sites frequently inflate ticket prices and fees well beyond traditional resale websites.

White label fraud works like this: A consumer uses Google or another search engine for tickets to an event or venue. Many sites which have tickets for sale are displayed. Despite having no relationship with the event or venue, these sites may use words like “official” or “box office” in relation to the venue or event. Under the belief a consumer is on the real ticket site, they will purchase a ticket. After completing several steps in the check-out process, the consumer will be hit with several additional fees which significantly raise the cost.

Deceptive URLs are a favored tactic of white label ticket sites. Sports Fans Coalition sent a consumer alert last year to educate fans about how they could better protect themselves.¹ In our message, we recommended to sports fans that, instead of using a search engine to find a ticket, they go to a trusted site like the venue itself or a trusted reseller.

In July of 2017, Sports Fans Coalition investigated this practice. What we discovered was more rampant fraud than what we had initially believed. To uncover the widespread fraud being committed on American sports fans, we Googled “Wrigley Field Tickets” into a browser in “incognito mode” with a cleared cache and cookies. Four of the top five results were deceptive URLs.

¹Source: Sports Fans Coalition Blog, April 28, 2017. *Fraud Alert: Online Ticket Dummy Sites*. Retrieved from http://www.sportsfans.org/fraud_alert_online_ticket_dummy_sites



 White Label	Wrigley Field Tickets 2017 - Chicago Schedule & Tickets <small>www.wrigley-field-tickets-center.com</small> (800) 833-7636 4.4 ★★★★★ rating for tickets-center.com 2017 Wrigley Field Tickets & Schedule. Secure Chicago Royals Tickets Online. Amenities: Huge Inventory, Interactive Seating Chart, Schedule and Tickets Types: Concert Tickets, Sporting Event Tickets, Theater & Show Tickets
 White Label	Wrigley Field Events - Box Office Tickets. Order Now <small>www.wrigleyfield-boxoffice-tickets.com</small> (800) 446-8539 Chicago, IL Marketplace. Buy Wrigley Field Tickets 100% on time guarantee - Instant E-Ticket Download - Premium Seating - Secure Encryption Categories: Country / Folk, Pop / Rock...
 White Label	Wrigley Field Tickets - Without The Fees - ticketclub.com <small>www.wrigleyfieldticketclub.com</small> Don't pay service fees for your tickets. Save 10-20% versus other sites.
 White Label	Wrigley Field Tickets - Wrigley Field Seating Chart Vivid Seats <small>www.vividseats.com</small> Buy Event Tickets Online Large Selection - Lower Prices Easy checkout - Unmatched service Ratings: Service 9/10 - Ease getting tickets 9/10 - Website 9/10 - Ease finding tickets 8.5/10
 White Label	Wrigley Field Tickets - Chicago, IL - Order Online <small>www.ticketliquidator.com/WrigleyField</small> (844) 753-8312 4.2 ★★★★★ rating for ticketliquidator.com Buy Wrigley Field Event Tickets! View 2017 Schedule and Grab your Seats. Transparent Pricing - 14 Years Online - All Sales Guaranteed - Friendly Support Staff Amenities: Same Day Tickets, Secure Checkout, Instant E-Tickets, PayPal Accepted

The above results are all search advertisements. However, organic searches yielded just as many deceptive results. For example, all five of the top results for “Fenway Box Office” were white label sites.

Fenway Park Tickets and Seating chart - Box Office Tickets <small>www.boxofficetickets.com/MA/Boston/Fenway-Park-Tickets</small> Best selection of Fenway Park Tickets at Box-officetickets.com Fenway Park event schedule, Fenway Park seating chart and tickets for sale.	 White Label
Fenway Park - Box Office Center <small>www.boxofficecenter.com/results-venue?venue=21&venue=Fenway+Park</small> Fenway Park has the following events taking place at the following dates and times. To sort the list, click on the column header. To find tickets for the given event, ...	 White Label
Fenway Park Tickets For Sale - Box Office Ticket Sales <small>www.boxofficeticketsales.com/venue/fenway-park-tickets-for-sale.aspx</small> Florida Georgia Line, Backstreet Boys, Nelly & Chris Lane - Fenway Park - Boston, MA - Tickets - Jul 8, 2017. Sat 6:30PM - New Kids on the Block, Paula Abdul ... Fri, Jul 28 Boston Red Sox vs. Kansas City Royals Fenway Park - Boston, MA Sat, Jul 29 Boston Red Sox vs. Kansas City Royals Fenway Park - Boston, MA Sun, Jul 30 Boston Red Sox vs. Kansas City Royals Fenway Park - Boston, MA	 White Label
Fenway Park Tickets - Fenway Park Box Office Ticket Center <small>www.boxofficeticketcenter.com/venues/fenway-park-tickets</small> Get Fenway Park Tickets direct at Box Office Ticket Center! Fenway Park seating charts, schedule and more! Call Fenway Park at 1-844-753-8364.	 White Label
Fenway Park <small>www.fenwayboxoffice.com</small> Fenway Park Boston, MA tickets for concerts, sports and all events ... Fenway Park in Boston, MA opened in 1912 and is the home of The Boston Red Sox ... Stubhub, Ticketmaster, Live Nation nor any venue, talent or booking agency, tour ...	 White Label

The use of deceptive URLs have accounted for nearly two-thirds of the traffic for companies that engage in this practice. According to our findings, sites that use deceptive URLs rely on search results for more than 80% of their traffic.²

The dangers of this practice are beyond just fooling fans into clicking on their site. There are major financial implications for sports fans. The following illustration shows how two companies, Vivid Seats and Ticket Network, use their affiliated white label sites to charge more for the same ticket.

² Source: www.alexa.com



State Houses across the country have been actively addressing similar legislation to HB 740. For example, last year, Nevada passed SB 235 which now protects fans from being duped by white label ticket sites.³ These deceptive practices have also earned the attention of both U.S. Senators and Representatives. In July 2017, Representatives Martino (PA-10) and Eshoo (CA-18) wrote the FTC.⁴ Later that September, Senators Booker (NJ) and Hatch (UT) also called on the FTC to investigate the use of white label ticket sites.⁵ In the Senators’ letter, they identified the same “anti-consumer behavior” that Sports Fans Coalition uncovered in our investigation: the suggestion of affiliation, illusions of comparison shopping, and excessive fees.

Sports Fans Coalition believes that the use of deceptive white label URLs should be banned. Fans should not be misled into thinking that they are dealing with a licensed or official vendor, or forced to spend significantly more money through inflated fees. Although the FTC has tried to curb the practice with a consent decree in 2014,⁶ the practice has proliferated. Since basketball and hockey season are well underway baseball season is right around the corner, Sports Fans Coalition calls on the Maryland House of Delegate to protect all Maryland fans from being deceived by white label ticket sites.

³ Source: Nevada State Senate. March 6, 2017. *SB. 235*. Retrieved from <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Session/79th2017/Bills/SB/SB235.pdf>

⁴ Source: Sports Fans Coalition Blog. September 16, 2017. *A Bipartisan Defense of Fans*. Retrieved from http://www.sportsfans.org/a_bipartisan_defense_of_fans

⁵ Source: Hatch, O. September 13, 2017. *Hatch, Booker Defend Consumer Rights in Ticket Resale Market*. Retrieved from <https://www.hatch.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/releases?ID=FBF30C56-BEC6-4016-BD3F-036869DB540C>

⁶ Source: FTC. July 24, 2017. *TicketNetwork and Marketing Partners Ryadd and Secure Box Office Settle Charges of Deceptively Marketing Resale Tickets*. Retrieved from <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2014/07/ticketnetwork-marketing-partners-ryadd-secure-box-office-settle>