

**JUDICIARY SESSION – MARCH 13, 2006 – COMMENTS**

**GOOD AFTERNOON, MY NAME IS BILL TATELMAN, FROM SOUTH WINDSOR  
THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK AT THIS PUBLIC HEARING  
IN SUPPORT OF BILL NO. HB-5786, “AN ACT CONCERNING ASSAULT OF A  
SPORTS OFFICIAL”.**

**I HAVE COME TODAY TO EXPRESS NOT ONLY MY THOUGHTS BUT ALSO  
THOSE OF MANY FELLOW OFFICIALS WHO PLAY SUCH AN INTEGRAL ROLE  
IN AMATEUR SPORTS THROUGHOUT THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT. AS A  
MEMBER OF THE CT BOARD OF APPROVED BASEBALL UMPIRES –  
HARTFORD CHAPTER, I HAVE UMPIRED ORGANIZED BASEBALL AT THE  
YOUTH, HIGH SCHOOL, AND ADULT LEAGUE LEVELS FOR THE PAST 31  
YEARS. I HAVE ALSO OFFICIATED HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL FOR THE  
PAST 9 YEARS WITH THE CENTRAL BOARD OF THE INTERNATIONAL  
BOARD OF APPROVED BASKETBALL OFFICIALS AS WELL AS HAVING  
REFEREED RECREATIONAL, TRAVEL AND ADULT LEAGUES FOR MANY  
YEARS. I HAVE ALSO ATTENDED MANY OF THESE AMATEUR SPORTING  
EVENTS AND WITNESSED FIRST HAND AN INCREASING TREND IN POOR  
BEHAVIOR EXHIBITED BY COACHES AND SPECTATORS.**

**WHY DO WE NEED THIS LEGISLATION NOW? WILL THIS LEGISLATION HELP  
TO DECREASE THE POSSIBILITY OF VERBAL AND PHYSICAL ASSAULT  
AGAINST SPORTS OFFICIALS? MY COMMENTS TODAY WILL ATTEMPT TO  
RESPOND TO BOTH OF THESE QUESTIONS.**

**IN ORDER TO ADDRESS WHY THIS LEGISLATION IS NEEDED NOW, IT IS  
IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THE ENVIRONMENT THAT EXISTS IN  
AMATEUR SPORTS TODAY. I BELIEVE THAT PARTICIPATION IN AMATEUR  
SPORTS HAS CLEARLY BEEN ON THE RISE. I KNOW THAT IN THE OFFICIALS  
ORGANIZATIONS THAT I AM AFFILIATED WITH, WE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE  
REQUESTS FROM NEW LEAGUES AND TEAMS EACH YEAR LOOKING FOR  
OFFICIALS TO SERVICE THEIR GAMES. AS SPORTS HAS TAKEN ON A MORE  
ACTIVE ROLE IN OUR DAILY LIVES, SO TOO HAS THE INVOLVEMENT OF  
PARENTS. PARENTS ARE INVESTING MORE TIME AND MONEY TO HAVE  
THEIR CHILDREN PARTICIPATE IN AMATEUR SPORTS AND MANY EXPECT  
SOMETHING IN RETURN. IT COULD BE A COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP, A  
PROFESSIONAL CONTRACT OR SIMPLY TRYING TO ACHIEVE THEIR OWN  
ATHLETIC DREAMS BY RELIVING THEIR YOUTH THROUGH THEIR  
CHILDREN. THEIR PASSION TO HAVE THEIR CHILDREN SUCCEED OFTEN  
LEADS TO BEHAVIOR THAT “CROSSES THE LINE”.**

**TODAY, THE WELL BEING OF AMATEUR SPORTS ESPECIALLY AT THE  
RECREATIONAL YOUTH AND ADULT LEAGUE LEVELS IS BEING SUBJECTED  
TO AN INCREASING TREND OF BAD BEHAVIOR OFTEN IN CLEAR VIEW OF  
THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE EITHER PARTICIPATING IN THE GAMES OR**

ARE THEIR TO WATCH THE GAMES. OVERZEALOUS FANS, COACHES AND PLAYERS OFTEN TAKE THEIR DISAPPOINTMENT OVER A CALL THAT AN OFFICIAL MADE OR DID NOT MAKE DURING A SPORTING EVENT, TOO FAR.

ALTHOUGH I HAVE NOT BEEN PHYSICALLY ASSAULTED WHILE OFFICIATING BASKETBALL OR UMPIRING BASEBALL, I HAVE BEEN VERBALLY THREATENED BY SPECTATORS AND PLAYERS, I HAVE BEEN ACCOSTED AT MY CAR AFTER A GAME BY A SPECTATOR SHOUTING PROFANITY AT ME WHILE I WAS SIMPLY TRYING TO LEAVE TO GO HOME AND I HAVE BEEN PHYSICALLY "BRUSHED" BY A FAN WHO CAME OUT OF THE STANDS AT A 7<sup>TH</sup> GRADE TRAVEL BASKETBALL GAME. HIS COMMENT TO ME AS HE CONTACTED ME WAS, "GO AHEAD, AND THROW ME OUT OF THE GYM". IN THIS INSTANCE I WAS CAUGHT OFF-GUARD AND SIMPLY TRIED TO MOVE AWAY FROM THE PROBLEM RATHER THAN ESCALATE IT.

AT MOST AMATEUR SPORTING EVENTS, THERE ARE NO SECURITY MEASURES TAKEN. OFFICIALS ARE PLACED IN A VERY VULNERABLE POSITION. WE OFTEN WORK IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE WE HOPE THAT RATIONALE BEHAVIOR PREVAILS.

LAST YEAR, WAS THE FIRST YEAR THAT THE CENTRAL CT YOUTH TRAVEL BASKETBALL LEAGUE HAD TO HIRE LOCAL POLICE TO BE AT THE (6<sup>TH</sup>, 7<sup>TH</sup> AND 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE BOYS) SEMIFINAL AND CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES TO ASSIST IN CONTROLLING UNRULY SPECTATORS.

I UNDERSTAND THAT COACHES, PLAYERS AND SPECTATORS WILL OBJECT TO DECISIONS MADE BY GAME OFFICIALS BUT AS A SOCIETY, WE MUST ACT ON THE BELIEF THAT RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY, WHETHER YOU AGREE WITH THE DECISIONS MADE BY SPORTS OFFICIALS OR NOT, IS CRITICAL TO LIVING AND PLAYING TOGETHER. THOSE WHO PARTICIPATE IN THE AVOCATION OF OFFICIATING YOUTH SPORTS OFTEN DO SO AS VOLUNTEERS OR ARE PAID MINIMAL FEES. THOSE WHO GIVE THEIR TIME TO OFFICIATE NOT ONLY DESERVE OUR RESPECT BUT THEY MUST HAVE COMPLETE CONFIDENCE THAT THEY WILL BE ABLE TO CARRY OUT THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT.

THE RESULT OF THE RECENT TREND OF POOR BEHAVIOR IN AMATEUR SPORTS HAS BEEN AN INCREASED EFFORT BY THOSE WHO GOVERN HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS AT PROMOTING SPORTSMANSHIP. THIS CONTINUES TO BE A POINT OF EMPHASIS AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL. THE CONNECTICUT INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC CONFERENCE HAS THE INFRASTRUCTURE IN PLACE TO TAKE STEPS THAT WILL LEAD TO IMPROVED BEHAVIOR AT CIAC SANCTIONED EVENTS. THE INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDED AT THE MANY YOUTH, TRAVEL, AAU AND ADULT LEAGUES OFTEN LACK THE RESOURCES TO ADDRESS THE NEED FOR IMPROVED SPORTSMANSHIP.

**IN THE OCTOBER 2001 ISSUE OF REFEREE – A MONTHLY MAGAZINE FOR SPORTS OFFICIALS, IN A COUNTRYWIDE SURVEY CONDUCTED BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SPORTS OFFICIALS, 90% OF THE STATE ASSOCIATIONS THROUGHOUT THE US THAT WERE SURVEYED, RESPONDED THAT THERE WAS A SHORTAGE OF OFFICIALS AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL. WHEN OFFICIALS WERE SURVEYED AS TO WHY THEY STOPPED OFFICIATING OTHER THAN JOB/CAREER CONFLICTS, THE PRIMARY REASONS OFFERED WERE 1) POOR SPORTSMANSHIP BY PARTICIPANTS AND 2) POOR SPORTSMANSHIP BY SPECTATORS. I CAN TELL YOU THAT THE AMATEUR SPORTS ENVIRONMENT HAS NOT IMPROVED SINCE 2001 AND AS A RESULT, IT HAS BECOME MORE DIFFICULT TO RECRUIT NEW OFFICIALS AND RETAIN EXISTING OFFICIALS.**

**AS A SUBSCRIBER TO REFEREE MAGAZINE SINCE 1986, I CAN SAY WITHOUT HESITATION THAT IT IS COMMONPLACE IN RECENT YEARS TO OPEN UP THE MAGAZINE TO READ ABOUT SPECIFIC ASSAULTS AGAINST SPORTS OFFICIALS THROUGHOUT THE US. 19 STATES HAVE ALREADY PASSED SIMILAR LEGISLATION TO PROTECT SPORTS OFFICIALS AND I BELIEVE THAT IT IS TIME FOR CONNECTICUT TO DO THE SAME.**

**WILL THIS LEGISLATION CURTAIL THE POSSIBILITY OF VERBAL AND PHYSICAL ASSAULTS AGAINST SPORTS OFFICIALS?**

**I BELIEVE THE ANSWER IS YES. I'M NOT NAÏVE ENOUGH TO BELIEVE THAT LEGISLATION ALONE CAN CHANGE BEHAVIOR BUT THIS LEGISLATION CAN SERVE AS A DETERRENT TO THOSE WHO SEEK TO VERBALLY OR PHYSICALLY ASSAULT SPORTS OFFICIALS. WE NEED TO HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS. CLEARLY THE PROPOSED LEGISLATION IS ONLY ONE COMPONENT TO TRY IMPROVE BEHAVIOR IN THE CURRENT AMATEUR SPORTS ENVIRONMENT. EDUCATING AND TRAINING YOUTH COACHES, FANS, PLAYERS, LEAGUE ADMINISTRATORS AS TO THE NEED FOR SPORTSMANSHIP AND APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR AT AMATEUR SPORTING EVENTS IS ALSO CRITICAL. THOSE OF US WHO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THIS AVOCATION AND STILL ENJOY WHAT IS GOOD IN AMATEUR SPORTS NEED THE SUPPORT OF OUR LEGISLATORS TO ENACT BILL HB-5786 THAT ENHANCES THE PENALTY TO THOSE WHO WOULD SEEK TO VERBALLY OR PHYSICALLY ASSAULT US ON ACCOUNT OF OUR PERFORMANCE WHILE CARRYING OUT OUR DUTIES.**

**THANK YOU FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK AT TODAY'S PUBLIC HEARING.**