Testimony of the Connecticut Society of Eye Physicians
On SB 825 An Act Concerning Paintball Safety
Presented to the Public Safety Committee
by Debbie Osborn
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Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Dargan, and members of the Public Safety Committee. For the record, my name is Debbie Osborn and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Society of Eye Physicians, the state society representing over 300 CT Eye M.D.s in support of SB 825An Act Concerning Paintball Safety.

As eye physicians and surgeons, ophthalmologists treat eye injuries but must also do their best to prevent the occurrence of these injuries. For example, an effective campaign in the 1970's lead to the prevention of 99% of eye injuries in ice hockey by mandating face shields in recreational, high school and college leagues.

Unfortunately, current regulations have not protected the citizens of our state (especially children) from blinding injuries caused by paintball guns. These "toys" propel a marble-sized gelatin capsule filled with dye at speeds exceeding 200 mph. In a way, they are more dangerous than BB guns as they are purposely aimed at other individuals. Though polycarbonate protective goggles and helmets are effective in preventing eye injuries, eyewear alone is not enough; reports in the medical literature show that one quarter of the eye injuries occur when masks are removed for fogging or splattered paint or when participants thought that they were in a time-out area. Education of the risks of injury with improper supervision or play is absolutely essential.

Innocent bystanders can be injured accidentally and malicious "drive-by" shootings (particularly at Halloween time) can also cause permanent, blinding injuries. At a local department store in Hartford, anyone can purchase a paintball gun (with CO2 cartridges and a supply of paintballs) for $18.83-neither helmets or eye protection are provided.

Ophthalmologists have seen dozens of devastating eye injuries in their practices during the past 10 years, mostly affecting children under the age of 18. These include ruptured globes, hemorrhages within the eye, retinal detachments and traumatic cataracts. These injuries often require one or more surgical repairs and even when successful, leave permanent visual damage.

It is our hope that this legislation will reduce these injuries by insuring that all paintball guns sold have available protective head gear and that participants in these games as well as anyone with access to these guns are aware of the danger of improper use. CT Eye M.D.'s support this because of our concern for the health and safety of all, but especially for our children who are clearly the most vulnerable.

Thank you for your time and attention; I would be happy to answer any questions.