

March 17, 2010

Education Committee

Julie Peters, Executive Director

Brain Injury Association of Connecticut

Mr. Chairmen and Members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this important hearing regarding the safety of our youth. My name is Julie Peters, I am the Executive Director of the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut, and I am here today in support of ***RSB 456: An Act Concerning Student Athletes and Concussions.***

For more than 25 years, the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut has worked to increase awareness, research, education and advocacy for people with brain injuries — and because prevention is the only cure, we are dedicated to providing our community with the facts necessary to reduce the number of brain injuries in Connecticut. Here are three of those facts:

- A concussion is a brain injury;
- All brain injuries are serious and
- according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), as many as 3.8 million sports and recreation-related concussions occur in the United States each year

The consequences of not addressing this public health crisis could be catastrophic.

Because a young, developing brain is more sensitive to trauma and because children have weaker necks than adults, making brain trauma more damaging, we have a responsibility to protect our youth from returning to play too soon after sustaining a concussion. Athletes who return to play before their brains heal experience a slower recovery and are at risk for long-term brain impairments. Repeated concussions cause *Second Impact Syndrome*, which is characterized by brain swelling, permanent brain damage and even death. The good news is that *Second Impact Syndrome* can be prevented.

Today, we can decide to give coaches the tools to keep our children safe by passing **RSB 456** — a simple Act that would ensure (1.) that coaches are trained to recognize the symptoms of brain injuries, concussions, and injuries related to *Second Impact Syndrome* and respond appropriately, and (2.) that health care professionals, trained in the treatment of concussions, would be the only ones permitted to determine if it is safe for a student to return to play.

Most parents and coaches are not professionally trained in medicine, which is why the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut believes this important legislation is so critical. The states of Washington and Oregon have passed this legislation last year and fourteen other states are introducing legislation this year. Less than a month after the law went into effect in Washington, a coach who had received the proper training sent an athlete to a physician after he recognized the signs of a possible concussion, where tests revealed that the student had a brain bleed. Had that student returned to play, the results would most probably have been catastrophic. The Washington law very probably saved his life.

It is time to get serious. It's time to protect our youth from needless disability, our parents from the lifelong burden of care-giving, and our State and its taxpayers from the long-term dependence on public programs that brain injuries foster.

We urge you to pass ***An Act Concerning Student Athletes and Concussions*** as soon as possible.