

THE CONNECTICUT INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC CONFERENCE, INC.

CIAC OFFICIALS' ASSOCIATION

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My name is Joe Tonelli. I am the Director of the CIAC Officials Association that has a membership of 4,000 high school sports officials who applaud and strongly support the intent of HB 5486– AN ACT CONCERNING THE ASSAULT OF A SPORTS OFFICIAL. Our association is most appreciative that an assault bill has been raised by the Judiciary Committee and would like to partner with you as the bill moves forward to see it come to fruition. . As a former teacher, coach and athletic director for nearly 40 years at Notre Dame High School in West Haven, I have witnessed an increase in violence, threatening behavior and verbal and physical assaults directed toward sports officials by players, coaches and fans. The folks that concern us the most are the adult fans because we have less control over them.

Fans get so emotionally charged and many truly believe that their admission ticket gives them a license to harass and threaten the game officials during and after an event. Many officials have been followed to their cars resulting in a verbal or physical confrontation.

Officials perform their duties in a highly charged environment where the volume is turned all the way up. Since the referees represent the only authority in the game, by the nature of their role, every time they make a call, usually half the people are upset and cross that line.

Legislation that calls for an enhanced penalty is a deterrent that will help prevent or reduce these incidents while providing an extra measure of protection for sports officials. It sends a strong message that this type of behavior will not be tolerated.

This past year an incident in Utah, that received national exposure, raised the awareness of the vulnerability of all sports officials. A 17 year old soccer player, after receiving a yellow card in a recreational league game, punched a soccer referee in the head and the 46 year old official later died.

We certainly don't want to wait for that to happen in Ct before we join the 20 plus other states that already have similar laws on the books. The law gives prosecutors and judges the tools they need to punish these acts to the fullest extent of the law.

Although many of these unfortunate situations go unreported, we could have brought many officials here today to tell their personal stories of situations that put referees and umpires in Connecticut in harm's way. Here is just an example of one such story.

A couple of years ago in Connecticut, during a softball tournament of 10 year old girls, a mother and father coaching duo confronted the plate umpire between innings. Both coaches were out of control and the Dad punched the umpire in the face. When that case finally reached the court room, the Judge asked why the charge was breach of peace and not an assault. Perhaps going forward it will be!

The interscholastic officials in our state are dedicated men and women who serve the sports in which they officiate, not for the fees involved, but rather for the love of the game and to help our youth. They deserve your support! Thanks for the opportunity to express my views and I want to reemphasize that we stand ready to do anything we can to assist in the process.

Those of us involved in amateur athletics

Respectfully submitted,

Joe Tonelli