

Good afternoon Representative Urban and the distinguished members of the Children's Committee. For the record, I am Diana Coyne, from Westport CT and a member of the Parents Concussion Coalition. I am here to testify in support of HB 5113 AN ACT CONCERNING YOUTH ATHLETICS AND CONCUSSIONS.

I am here because I know all too well the seriousness of these brain injuries and that these injuries change lives. I am also a huge believer in the benefits of sports, but I know that we can make sports safer by taking simple measures to provide basic protections for our youth athletes. Many of these measures are already being done in most states throughout the country.

You will hear the testimony of my son, Chris who had 5 concussions in high school—most that he didn't report. He was then recruited to play football at Yale and had what turned out to be his 6th concussion while playing early his freshman year.

These brain injuries can affect memory, concentration, decision-making, sleep, and all too often cause mental health issues, and occur much more frequently than people think. The Institute of Medicine's report on youth concussions documented that in football, high school athletes had twice the rate of concussions as their collegiate counterparts. And it's not just football; other sports such as hockey, lacrosse, soccer and cheerleading also have high rates.

Over the past 4 years, we have seen the NFL and other leagues make sweeping changes to player safety at all levels of play. The NFL allows just 14 contact practices per season. The Ivy League is entering into its 4th year of contact practice limits and Pop Warner (our youngest athletes) also implemented limits a couple years ago. But there are no limitations protecting high school athletes and other youth athletes in children in CT.

If passed, this landmark legislation will change that. CT will be the first state in the county that focuses on primary measures to prevent brain injuries, instead of just measures to manage the injury after it has occurred.

This bill includes a provision that limits full contact practice to 90 minutes per week, defined in such a way that it could apply to many contact sports. In prior drafts of the bill, this practice limitation was sport specific just to football, and we recommend that the language be changed back to just include football. We also applaud CIAC's recent announcement mandating full contact practice limits of 60-120 minutes per week and we recommend that the bill reflect this sliding scale. It is important that both the law and CIAC's directive clearly define contact practices and how the time is calculated. We have heard from many coaches that CIAC's directive leaves too much leeway for interpretation, which will result in no protect at all for our children.

Lastly, we worked very hard for the past year in a half. It was only after we found a champion in the Children's Committee did steps for these updated concussion policies begin in CT. We are very concerned that the stakeholder groups will recommend that we continue to "study this issue" or "form a task force" or somehow continue to kick the can down the street. I urge you--these children don't have a voice and its time that we enact these safety measures for them. Thank you