

Leon Johnson testimony concerning HB 5113

Dear Legislator,

My name is Leon Johnson and I am a sports official in the sport of Basketball. I live in the town of Ansonia.

I am writing to express my concern regarding HB 5113- AN ACT CONCERNING YOUTH ATHLETICS AND CONCUSSION. Although everyone connected with high school athletics is genuinely concerned about the health and safety of the participants, HB 5113 as drafted is ill conceived and takes a "One size fits all" approach which is problematic. It will result in numerous unintended consequences that will be detrimental to high school and youth sports.

Since many others will attest to what CIAC, schools, athletic directors, coaches and trainers are doing and will continue to do to make sports safer for the participants, I will focus on the detrimental effect this proposed legislation is certain to have on the 4,000 high school officials and numerous youth officials. Specifically, mandating additional requirements for referees, who are independent contractors, and increasing the liability exposure for these individuals who serve high school and youth sports, will have a major negative impact.

There is a shortage of officials on all levels of amateur sports and HB 5113, as drafted, is certain to be a deterrent to attracting new officials and keeping the ones we have. While several states, including New Jersey, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, have laws that extend immunity to officials against law suits to reduce their liability, this proposed law would increase the exposure for officials in Connecticut, which would be devastating.

It is important for you to understand that the role of the referees is to fairly and impartially enforce the NFHS playing rules while helping to ensure that the games are conducted in a safe environment to minimize risks for the participants. The NFHS 'concussion rule" does not create a duty that officials are expected to perform a medical diagnosis. Referees are simply being asked to use their best judgment in observing and being more cognizant of athletes that may be displaying signs, symptoms and behaviors consistent with concussion, and stop play to provide the opportunity for the athlete to be properly checked by the individuals in charge of their care.

To prepare for this role, each year the officials are required to complete in -service training clinics, and an annual examination on the NFHS rules, including an annual review in recognizing the signs and symptoms of concussions in accordance with NFHS rules in all sports. To assist local and state official's boards, the CIAC has provided concussion cards that contain the signs and symptoms of concussion and other pertinent information and a protocol for officials to follow for all injuries, including concussions.

The officials in our state are dedicated men and women who serve the sport(s) in which they officiate, not for the fee involved, but rather for the love of the game and to help our youth. In short, although this proposed legislation might be well intended, HB 5113 should not be passed as drafted. It is not in the best interest of high school or youth sports. Thank you for the opportunity to express my views.

Respectfully submitted,

Leon Johnson