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Committee on Children Public Hearing Testimony

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Good Afternoon Representative Urban, Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Betts and Senator Linares and the distinguished members of the Children's Committee. My name is Deb Shulansky, and I am testifying today in favor of Raised Bill 5113: *An Act Concerning Youth Athletes And Concussions*, as the Director of Community Outreach and Support at the Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut (BIAC), a member of the State of CT TBI Advisory Board, the Connecticut Concussion Task Force, and the CT State Team for Community of Practice for Prevention of TBI. Additionally, I am the mother of high school athletes who have sustained several concussions. In fact, one of my daughters had post-concussion syndrome and was on medical leave for 3 months during her sophomore year of high school.

In my role at BIAC, I work to increase awareness and understanding of concussion and other brain injuries. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), as many as 3.8 million sports and recreation-related concussions occur in the United States each year. While concussion awareness is increasing, there remains a lack of public understanding of brain injury and its consequences. The only **REAL CURE** for a brain injury is prevention.

Young, developing brains are more sensitive to trauma, and children have weaker necks than adults, making brain trauma more damaging. As a result, 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 significant long-term brain impairments. Returning to play before a concussed brain has healed can sometimes 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.

In 2010, this State passed Senate Bill 456: *An Act Concerning Student Athletes and Concussions*. This Legislation gave coaches necessary tools to keep our student

athletes safe and it is an important first step in concussion management, however, too many individuals are not sufficiently able to recognize the signs and symptoms of concussion.

It is **precisely** for this reason that Raised Bill 5113 should be passed. Concussion education which provides accurate information about the signs and symptoms of concussion, to athletes, parents and referees, in addition to coaches, will help to facilitate recognition, proper diagnosis and needed treatment of concussion.

Recognizing and properly responding to a concussion when it first occurs is critical, and the proper management of a concussion is key. However, since it may not be evident right away if an athlete has sustained a concussion, requiring concussion education and informed consent prior to participation in a sport is equally necessary and important. Requiring acknowledgment by parents and guardians that they have been educated about concussion signs, symptoms, management and potential consequences will help to fill a gap in what is understood about concussion, and more important, enable informed consent to the inherent risk of concussion in sports.

In 2012, the youth football organization, Pop Warner, limited the amount of full-speed collisions and other contact allowed during football practices as a result of studies that have shown that repetitive brain trauma may result in a permanent decline in cognitive function. This bill seeks to limit full contact practice to 90 minutes per week. Limiting contact during practice is an easy and feasible way to reduce the risk of concussion.

Accordingly, I urge you to pass Raised House Bill 5113 to reduce the number of concussions in children in our state.

Thank you.

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