

Dear Representative Urban, Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Betts, and Senator Linares and the distinguished members of the Children's Committee. For the record, my name is Joseph Bonitatebus from Ridgefield Connecticut, and this is my testimony in support of/on HB 5113, AN ACT CONCERNING YOUTH ATHLETICS AND CONCUSSIONS.

March 9th, 2008, a day I will not forget. This is the day I sustained a concussion that affected me for two years, from a simple game of street hockey in the driveway with my brother. I caught a stick to the face, right on the bridge of my nose, and my life changed just like that.

About a half an hour after I was hit I started to feel very fatigued and tired and I kept saying to my parents that I wanted to lie down and go to sleep. My mom then knew something else was going on besides my bruised nose. She immediately called a friend who was a nurse and was told that I may have a concussion and should be taken to the hospital. Once we got to the hospital the doctor had me walk in a straight line and asked me simple questions, like if I knew where I was, what the date was, etc. I had a cat scan done just to make sure there was nothing going on in my head that we could not see. That came back normal, but concussions do not show up on these scans, so I was diagnosed with a mild concussion and a broken nose and was told to take some aspirin and I would be fine within a couple days.

The next day my mom came in to wake me up for school and she had a difficult time doing so, normally I would wake up right away but not this day. I got up and complained about having a pounding headache so she gave me some aspirin decided to let me stay home from school. Even though I was home with a headache I still did all the things I would normally do while I was sick, watch TV, play video games, go on the computer, and listen to music. I had no idea that doing these simple activities would set me back even more. The next day I went to school even

with the pounding headaches. I made it through just a couple of classes and after staring at the computer screens to read for too long I just could not take it, I had to come home.

Weeks passed and we went from doctor to doctor, medication to medication, and my headaches were not getting any better. It was a frustrating time for my whole family; we did not know what we could do. It was not until 6 weeks later that we found a doctor who specialized in sports type injuries and especially concussions and got the help we needed. He said I was suffering from Post Concussion Syndrome and that it was a very serious thing. He talked about symptoms that I did not even realize I was suffering from other than the headaches, I was sensitive to light and noise and I felt like I was in a fog. He told me that I needed to stop going to school and stop doing all of my normal day activities, I needed to shut down and just rest. This method was what he called cocoon therapy which removes all the things that stimulate the brain the most to allow it to heal naturally without stimulation. There was a long list of things I could not do from seeing my friends, doing anything active, watching TV, playing video games, texting, going on a computer, all of the things kids my age, at the time, do every day. I just had to sit at home and the most I could do was listen to books on tape, play cards, or play with Legos. And even then I could only do these things for small amounts of time. I went through this style of treatment for a couple of months before I started to ease back into everything. If we had known this right away I could have recovered quicker and it could have saved us years of trouble.

This not only affected me but it affected my family as well. My little sister, who was three at the time, would want to play with me but did not understand that I was not able to. She had to be quiet around the house for the most part because of my headaches and this frustrated her. My parents also felt helpless since there was not much for them to do except letting my brain heal itself.

After six months of constant pounding headaches, getting caught up on the school work I had missed, and being eased back into reality, I was finally almost healed. My headaches were very minimum and I was not in that fog anymore. But just like that I got hit in the head again while I was at the pool resting with my family and I immediately felt the headaches come back. Since my initial concussion was not healed all the way, this second blow to my head brought back my symptoms just like that. Thankfully this time they were not as bad as before. But after this I went basically one whole year with bad headaches every day.

It took me two years before I was symptom free. I then started doing work with the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut, talking to numerous parents and students about how serious concussions are. I did not want anyone to go through what I had to go through and I hoped that by sharing my knowledge and story that people would know what to do and would not feel lost or uneducated.

How can we expect kids or parents to know what a concussion is, the affects they have, or how to treat one without the proper education. By not passing this bill would be not protecting our young athletes and it will continue to be detrimental to their safety.