

Testimony for HB 5113

Dear Legislator,

My name is Mike Giannelli and I am a youth and high school sports official for Football and Lacrosse as well as a youth coach for lacrosse. I live in the town of Norwich and I am writing to express my concern for HB 5113- AN ACT CONCERNING YOUTH ATHLETICS AND CONCUSSION

I have been a youth and high school official for both football and lacrosse in the state of Connecticut for 5 years. I also serve as the Norwich Youth Lacrosse Association president, boys coach, and referee coordinator. I am writing to express my serious concerns regarding HB 5113 as drafted – AN ACT CONCERNING YOUTH ATHLETICS AND CONCUSSIONS. Although everyone connected with youth and 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 US Lacrosse, NFHS, 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 high school students, 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. At most youth lacrosse levels the officials are high school students because there are not enough qualified adults. 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 high school 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, women and high school students 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 is very 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,
Mike Giannelli