

Good afternoon members of the Committee on Children,

My name is Robert Pepi. I thank you for the opportunity to testify on Raised Bill No. 6722 An Act Concerning Concussions in Youth Athletics.

I am here today as a former teacher, father of three sons active in multiple sports, a coach of 33 years in youth sports, a high school varsity coach for close to 20 years, the Director of the Stamford Youth Soccer League and as an executive member of the Stamford Youth Sports Coalition, a group of non-profit organizations including soccer, football, lacrosse, hockey, wrestling, baseball ...many of us serving the Stamford community for 40-50 years. In short much of my last 30 plus years has been devoted to kids and their physical and social development.

While they are in my care my player's safety has been a top priority for me. So I am a strong supporter of recent initiatives in the area of concussion education. In the last several years I have personally overseen the care of a number of my athletes who have suffered possible concussions. I'm grateful for the increased awareness of concussions in the sports arena. It's important.

As a person with more than 30 years as a leader in the non-profit youth sports environment I am also acutely aware of the practical consequences of mandates from above which have not been carefully grounded in the day to day practical reality of youth sports organization and management.

The groups I am representing here today are very concerned about Section 2, (2) lines 46-51 which stipulate that "operators of a youth athletic activity **shall provide a written statement** regarding concussions to **each youth athlete and a parent or legal guardian**. Such written statement **shall be provided upon registration of each youth athlete ...**" Seems like a positive step and makes great sense until you consider the manner in which many of our youth actually become registered in our leagues. For example, does "upon registration" mean at the moment of registration or could it mean "subsequent to" or "during or after" registration? An important clarification needs to be made.

Stamford Youth Soccer registers about 3,000 kids over the course of three separate seasons each year. Most parents register their children online and they could be led to attest to having read a section on concussions before their registration is allowed to complete. That's relatively simple.

But some 20-30% each season register by means of paper forms delivered to them in school by their teachers, sent in the mail or emailed to them in a blast registration email.

Many of their parents do not use computers so online information doesn't cut it. A significant portion of them don't even use checks but rather cash or money orders. I suspect that the demographic of foreign born, sometimes non English speaking people in Stamford is similar to the one in Norwalk, Bridgeport, New Haven, Hartford and other Connecticut towns.

The registration forms drift in right up through the beginning of each season as folks become aware of our league. This is a common feature of many groups in the City who are beginning to reach outside of their ethnic communities and into the broader culture. We feel that they will be adversely affected by uncompromising mandates and many will miss the benefits of sports in the wider community.

This paper registration process coming as it does in bits and pieces does not lend itself to efficient, practical adherence to a law mandating provision of a written statement....at least one that needs be verifiable.

And if this bill were state law as written and a parent whose child suffers a concussion decided to sue one of our leagues claiming that they were never given a "written statement" what happens to our organizations and the thousands of kids that we serve? We fear serious liability exposure that could threaten our existence and our mission. A parent could claim that when the info was distributed they were not at practice, or at opening day and never got it. If we mailed the info or emailed the info to registrants they could claim they never received it as mandated by state law and how can we prove that we did send it? We have scores of situations each season in which street addresses and emails and phone numbers have changed and we have not been notified.

This is not the case of a high school team with a small number of kids who meet every day for practice. That's relatively simple to track and to insure compliance. We are talking about many hundreds of kids. It's simply not practical to expect 1,400 kids to be together on one or even two or three days to sign off on receiving a set of papers on concussions. And if we can't prove that we "**provided**" it to them could we be held in violation of state law?

Our organization relies on several hundred volunteer coaches. They are vital to our mission to serve our kids. Yet they are of course people of varying degrees of thoroughness. What if we rely on passing info out through them? Again we are vulnerable to the person who says "My coach never gave me the info and now my son has a concussion and you were responsible according to state law".

This concern of liability goes away if a few words are simply changed from "**shall provide**" to "**shall make available in written, electronic or online form information regarding concussions**". In this case youth sports organizations can continue to provide concussion information on their websites, via handouts and through email communications yet not be held in violation of state law if they cannot prove that someone was "provided" some information.

The mandate to provide information not only to the parents but also the athletes themselves is another huge area of practical difficulties which also goes away if the mandate becomes to make the information "available".

We strongly believe that working together we can achieve the goal of the proponents of this bill without jeopardizing the continued viability of our youth sports programs.

Last year when youth sports programs across the state rose to object to some of the very same language in the concussion bill as then proposed ...the entire section referencing youth sports was simply struck from the bill. I felt strongly then and expressed at that time that it was not a moment to pat ourselves on the back for our success but rather a missed opportunity to advance concussion safety for the kids in our charge all across this state. Change a few words from a mandate with a liability attached to a mandate with an opportunity attached....an opportunity to advance concussion education in our communities. We hope that we do not miss that opportunity again.