



ParentsConcussionCoalition

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Testimony in favor of HB 6722, with modifications

Distinguished Members of the Children's Committee, my name is Pippa Bell Ader, and I am a member of the Parents Concussion Coalition. I am writing in support of HB #6722 with some modifications.

As the parent of a young man who has permanent cognitive challenges as a result of a concussion that was not managed well, back in 2007, I am invested in achieving better concussion prevention and management for CT's youth. But I am not the only one. James Whitehead, the CEO of American College of Sports Medicine reported that a 2014 ESPN/Aspen Institute survey on youth sport issues showed that more than 87 percent of parents surveyed worry about the risk of injury, with concussion cited as the injury of most concern. A quarter of all parents have considered keeping their children from playing a sport because of fears about concussions and other head injuries. And participation in team sports among children ages 6-12 has declined from 44.5 percent in 2008 to 40 percent in 2013, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association. To quote Mr. Whitehead, "Only through a large-scale mobilization and engagement between the medical community and those involved with youth sports will the risks become better understood, prevention rise, and treatment improve."*

A year ago CT had one of the weakest concussion laws in the nation, with no athlete and parent education. With the signing of PA 14-66 (An Act Concerning Youth Athletics and Concussions) in May 2014, CT now has basic protections for predominantly public school based interscholastic and intramural athletes.

While 20 other states now provide protections for youth athletes who engage in sports outside of public school, CT does not. * There is no CT state law that has ANY concussion provisions for ANY youth sports outside of Interscholastic and intramural sports, including private schools.

We are not asking a coach to diagnose concussions. We are asking a coach to remove an athlete from play if the coach suspects a concussion, by observing signs or symptoms, just as a parent would identify a possible illness, and then take her child to a health care professional for a diagnosis.

As for athlete and parent concussion education, requiring that written information be provided prior to the athlete's participation in a sport every year is a first step. You will find that some athletic organizations are already educating the parents and athletes, using the free 30 minute online CDC training and other nationally recognized concussion education programs. That may seem overwhelming to the sports operators, but change is always a challenge. Remember when CT implemented a law that requires coach background checks, the CORI law? Initially those requirements were seen a burdensome, and now the work involved is taken in stride, because it is the right thing to do for our children.



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An effective concussion law should also require a graduated Return To Play protocol, to better ensure that all athletes have fully recovered before beginning physical activity. Written permission to return to play and supervision should be provided by a health care professional trained in concussion management.

As Lisa Paradis, director of Brookline Massachusetts Parks and Recreation Department stated to the Legislative Youth Concussion Task Force this fall, there are many good reasons to pass a stronger bill. Educating the athletes, parents and coaches, early in the process has the advantage of expanding awareness, which then becomes the norm, at a time when kids actually listen to their parents! Requiring coaches to follow model practice guidelines including remove from play and return to play guidelines, allows for decisive action by the coach/volunteer/parent. Coaches have even been known to thank the organization for requiring this training as it makes it easier to remove an athlete from play and makes it more likely that the athlete doesn't return to play too soon.

You don't have to go far to read about concussion lawsuits and tragic repercussions of repeated concussions and sub-concussive blows. Although I am not a lawyer, I suspect implementation of an effective law will actually provide MORE protections to the coaches and sports operators of CT, and of course, to the children of CT. To quote Paul Slager, a litigation lawyer and past president of the Brain Injury Alliance of CT "As the law stands now, a person can fully comply with CT law while still acting well below the safety standards that have been established across the county, leaving that person vulnerable to liability claims."* To quote Hosea Harvey, a professor of law and public health expert, "...there is no evidence that youth sports TBI laws have cause increased litigation ... While I understand and appreciate the concerns of those who fear an increase in litigation when government imposes additional duties on private actors or volunteers, I am not familiar with any empirical evidence from this area that suggests there is even a modest correlation between the presence of such affirmative duties and a concomitant rise in lawsuits."* These statements, from previous testimony, still ring true for HB 6722.

We are relying on you, CT's legislators, to promote a more comprehensive law, protecting not only public school athletes, but all athletes who participate in competitive recreational sports, including private school athletes.

Thank you,

Pippa Bell Ader, Parents Concussion Coalition

*http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-r-whtiehead/safety-in-youth-sports-pa_b_6061634.html



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*Network for Public Health Law:

https://www.networkforphl.org/_asset/xc41pl/Sports-Concussion-Table.pdf

*<http://www.cga.ct.gov/2014/KIDdata/Tmy/2014HB-05113-R000227-Hosea%20H.%20Harvey,%20Temple%20University-TMY.PDF>

*<http://www.cga.ct.gov/2014/KIDdata/Tmy/2014HB-05113-R000227-Paul%20Slager,%20Esq.%20of%20Ridgefield,%20CT%20and%20BIAC-TMY.PDF>