

February 16, 2016

Committee on Children Public Hearing Testimony

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Good Afternoon Representative Urban, Senator Bartolomeo and the distinguished members of the Children's Committee. My name is Deb Shulansky and I am the Director of Community Outreach and Support at the Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut (BIAC), a member of the Connecticut Concussion Task Force, and a member of the Injury and Violence Prevention ACTION Team for the Healthy Connecticut 2020 State Health Improvement Plan. Additionally, I am the mother of three athletes, two have a history of sustained concussions and one had post-concussion syndrome and was on medical leave for 3 months during her sophomore year of high school.

I am testifying today regarding Raised Bill 5141: *AN ACT CONCERNING CONCUSSIONS AND YOUTH ATHLETIC ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED ON PUBLIC FIELDS*, which extends existing legislation on concussion education and management to operators of youth athletic activities utilizing public athletic fields, by requiring them to follow concussion protocols substantially similar to those currently used for intramural and interscholastic athletic activities.

This bill contains important provisions which will enhance the safety of youth sports, however, as a result of the inclusion of an immunity clause, there is no incentive to adhere to the important and potentially lifesaving provisions of this law. Accordingly, I cannot support this bill, as drafted, because it includes an immunity clause which circumvents the intent of the law: to protect Connecticut's youth athletes.

Proper concussion protocol for youth athletes is a necessity regardless of the operator or the location of the athletic activity. Concussion education must be mandatory for all youth athlete coaches regardless of whether an athletic endeavor is part of a school sports program, through a town or club league or at a sports or sports-related activity on state or municipally operated spaces. Best practices for concussion management is changing and therefore requiring a coach to have a refresher course every two years ensures current information regarding

recognition of the signs and symptoms of concussion and best practices relating to proper recognition, management and treatment of concussions. Recognizing a possible concussive impact and properly responding when a concussion first occurs is essential.

Additionally, it is critical that this education mandate begin with athletes as young as age 5, so that the culture of reporting and treating concussions can begin to change with the youngest athletes involved in organized youth athletic programs.

In my role at BIAC, I work to increase awareness and understanding of concussion and other brain injuries. While concussion awareness is increasing, there remains a lack of public understanding of brain injury and its consequences. Young, developing brains are more sensitive to trauma, and children have weaker necks than adults, making brain trauma potentially more damaging to youngsters. As a result, we have a responsibility to protect all of our youth athletes, regardless of the operator or location of the sports activity.

I urge you to continue the efforts of this State to reduce the number of concussions sustained by Connecticut's children by holding accountable those who do not adhere to best practices for concussion recognition, management and treatment.

Thank you.

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