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# THE CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS

Testimony of the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) and the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC)

HB 5141: An Act Concerning Concussions and Youth Athletic Activities Conducted on Public Athletic Fields

February 16, 2016

My name is Dr. Karissa Niehoff. I am the Executive Director of CAS-CIAC. Our association represents approximately 1000 member schools- public, parochial, charter and magnet- Pre-K through grade 12. We are the regulating body for high school athletics and have been intimately involved in the development and implementation of policies and practices regarding concussion education at the youth level within Connecticut public schools.

While we support the intent of HB 5141- to expand the awareness and educational efforts regarding concussions at the youth sport level outside of school programs- we cannot support the bill as drafted. Many of the proposed requirements would be difficult, if not impossible, to implement and to enforce. Requiring all recreational coaches (many of whom are volunteer) to take a course, and all parents to read or view training materials and offer signed consent for participation, is well-intentioned but simply not possible to expect in many of our towns and cities.

In some communities- yes- the “power of the permit” philosophy can serve to help organize efforts and accountability around concussion education. However, in a great many communities, Parks and Recreational programs and “open gym” situations at local YMCAs are critical opportunities for underprivileged youth; many of whom don’t have money to join highly organized programs or even the parents or guardians who are available to sign a consent form.

It is simply not realistic to expect that all children- statewide- will have parents participate in concussion education and offer signed consent. It is also unrealistic to expect local parks and recreation organizations, or other municipal based programs, to be able to enforce- to a person- that all parents and coaches have undergone required training, etc. Part of the enforcement process are sanctions...are we to deny a child the chance to engage in positive opportunities simply because their parent or guardian didn’t complete concussion awareness training? When it is so difficult to find adults willing to coach recreational programs on a volunteer basis- or fill in for one another if a crisis arises- are we going to shut down programs because not everyone has taken concussion education that is defined by state statute?

While we support efforts to expand concussion education- and education in many areas of health and safety- we also recognize the challenges that additional state mandates in this area would present. Schools already provide this training- for kids and parents engaged in athletic or intramural activity. We believe it is enough to require that information and training are provided- but not mandated- for the reasons listed above. We cannot support HB 5141 as written as many children would be prohibited from participation in activities that are important for their positive growth and development, and for some, their pathway to a positive future.