



**CONNECTICUT  
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ASSOCIATION**

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**Testimony on behalf of  
The Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association, Inc.  
Before the Committee on Children  
February 16, 2016**

**Raised Bill 5141 – An Act Concerning Concussions in Youth Athletics Activities  
Conducted on Public Athletic Fields**

My name is William Engle, I am the Recreation Supervisor for the Glastonbury Parks and Recreation Department and an Executive Board member of the CT Recreation and Parks Association. I am a father of two children who have been active in youth sports for a number of years and I, personally, have either worked with or actively coached youth sports for over 25 years. I am here today representing the Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association, regarding Raised Bill 5141 - An Act Concerning Concussions in Youth Athletics Activities on Public Athletic Fields.

The Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association, Inc. (CRPA) is a nonprofit charitable organization whose mission is to provide a network of support to our members through professional development and resources in order to enhance the quality of recreation and parks services in Connecticut. CRPA represents over 600 individual professionals from municipal, nonprofit and private, park, recreation & camp organizations, as well as 125 of the 169 municipal park and recreation departments in Connecticut.

For more than 65 years ensuring that children have the greatest opportunity to safely participate in physical activity has been central to CRPA's mission. Consequently, CRPA supports efforts to raise awareness and educate coaches, parents, guardians, and participants in youth athletics on the dangers of concussions. CRPA is more than willing to provide information to those directly participating in park and recreation run programs. However, we cannot oversee or ensure compliance of independent leagues that simply utilize municipal fields and facilities.

**Therefore, CRPA reluctantly cannot support Raised Bill 5141 as drafted.**

CRPA has several concerns with of Raised Bill 5141:

First and foremost, the bill is mandating that volunteer youth athletic coaches be subjected to the protocols set forth in section 10-149b, which is required of paid interscholastic coaches. We ask that you keep in mind that in today's economic climate, most parents/guardians come from either a dual income family or single-working parent family. Time spent with their children is grossly limited. Many coaches volunteer their time to coach as a way to connect with their child and their friends. Often it may be the only quality time spent together. It is a challenge for league administrator's to get volunteers to general meeting let alone to all practices and games. Furthermore, for some of the larger youth sport programs there are simply not enough adult coaches to fill all the teams and have to rely on high school students to fill the gaps. This bill will add much more time to the training protocol, thus becoming prohibitive. It is not uncommon that due to multiple conflicts, a coach may have to discontinue mid-season. The requirements of this bill make it impossible to bring in new coach on board.

This being said, changing the age parameters on the definition of ***“Youth athletic activity”*** from seven to five years further expands the limited resources to adhere to the mandate. Additionally, the definition is overly broad. It includes 18 years olds that have graduated high school. Indirectly it affects adult leagues and open recreation programs.

The definition of **“Operator”** cannot include “coordinates, organizes or otherwise oversees any youth athletic activity”. Municipal park and recreation departments have no authority over independent leagues’ coaches and have no contact with parents or participants that participate in these leagues, but they do schedule independent leagues field/facility usage or have some other kind of minimal involvement and therefore may *“coordinate and organize”* for them under the bill’s definition. This creates an unenforceable mandate for park and recreation departments and consequently a severe liability issue, which will cause municipalities to not allow such leagues to use their fields or facilities.

The of the definition of **“Operator”** and the definition of **Public athletic field”** as stated in this bill, not only implies that municipalities carry the liability of insuring each coach in both municipal and independent leagues are properly trained in accordance to section 10-149b, it also mandates that municipalities must carry the liability of insuring that every parent/guardian, both in the municipal and independent league, completes an informed consent signed by the parent/guardian. This is an impossible task, especially with regards to the independent leagues which govern themselves and there is no way to guarantee that all consent forms have been collected.

Last, but not least, because of the large number of independent leagues and large number volunteer coaches who have such limited time, Raised Bill 5141 is simply unenforceable. Unlike interscholastic sports, which has one governing body, Municipal and independent leagues in each community govern themselves differently. The relationships between the two also vary between communities. As a result a “one-size-fits all” bill of this magnitude will not work and will negatively impact youth sports in Connecticut.

CRPA commends the committee for their efforts to ensure the safety of all of Connecticut’s children, **but CRPA cannot support Raised Bill 5141 as it is currently written.**

CRPA has worked very hard over the last several decades to increase access to recreation as a means to combat obesity and give children a healthy alternative for the use of their time. We cannot support legislation that is counterproductive to these initiatives. Our organization stands ready to work with the Children’s Committee to draft legislation that can be reasonably administered on a daily basis.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any of your questions.

William Engle  
Member, CRPA Executive Board and Legislative Committee