



House Bill 5156
An Act Requiring the Use of Neck Guards in Youth Hockey

Committee on Children
February 22, 2022

Senator Anwar, Representative Linehan, and distinguished members of the Committee on Children, on behalf of the physicians and physicians in training of the Connecticut State Medical Society and the Connecticut State Medical Society Sports Medicine Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony to you today on House Bill 5156, An Act Requiring the Use of Neck Guards in Youth Hockey.

We understand and empathize with the heartbreaking event that has given rise to this proposed legislation and extend our heartfelt condolences to the family of Teddy Balkind.

A catastrophic laceration to the neck during an ice hockey game is a tragic event; it is also a very rare event. The governing body of youth ice hockey, USA Hockey, the National Federation of High Schools, as well as the NCAA and the NFL all recommend but do not mandate neck guards as part of the uniform of their ice hockey players. The public, independent, parochial schools and youth hockey programs decisions are guided by the information from their governing sports bodies and may or may not mandate their athletes use neck guards.

The Connecticut State Medical Society Sports Medicine Committee must oppose House Bill 5156 because we do not have sufficient medical evidence to support the recommendations contained in this Bill.

The literature regarding the prevalence of neck laceration in ice hockey, use of neck guards to prevent injury, safety of neck guards, and contraindications to neck guards is sparse. A recent Pubmed search and a review of USA hockey documents, provide the following information:

- According to a USA hockey survey, 27% of players who sustain a neck laceration were wearing a neck guard at the time of the injury
- According to research presented during the 2022 USA Hockey meeting- while neck lacerations are potentially catastrophic, the majority of reported neck lacerations are superficial: 20 (61%) required bandaging only, 11 were sutured, and 2 were glued.
- Currently available neck laceration protectors do not eliminate the risk of a neck laceration from a skate blade.
- Damage to the neck guard is not an indicator of the cut resistance of a neck guard.
- Neck laceration protectors with Spectra fibers are the most cut resistant.

- Some neck laceration protectors shrink after washing. Shrinkage results in decreased surface area that may expose more of a player's neck & reduce the effectiveness of the protector.
- Neck laceration protectors have a negative impact on cervical spine range of motion.

The Connecticut State Medical Sports Medicine Committee would instead make the following recommendations:

- Further research to determine the effectiveness of neck guards in hockey and determine any adverse impact, particularly on the potential effect of decreased range of motion on cervical spine injury risk.
- Further research to determine standards to guide the development of design and performance of hockey neck protectors,
- A task force be formed to further assess the use of neck guards in youth hockey including current literature review; representative of the Connecticut State Medical Society Sports Medicine Committee to be included in such task force.
- Youth organizations and schools should follow the recommendations of the governing bodies of the sport.
- If neck guards are recommended for youth sports, the Connecticut State Medical Society Sports Medicine Committee should work with our State officials to influence the sport governing bodies to amend their recommendations.

Thank you for the ability to present testimony on House Bill 5156 and we look forward to working with this Committee on this important topic.