



Representative Bill Roemer
38th House District
Sponsor Testimony HB 208

Good morning Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee. I appreciate this opportunity to come before you, along with my colleague Representative Joe Miller, to deliver sponsor testimony in support of House Bill 208.

As many of you may know, I have coached baseball for 27 years, and have personally played baseball, football and basketball for decades. In coaching and playing over a thousand games, I have never received a red card, been ejected, or received even a technical foul. Many of those involved in sports throughout our state and country cannot say the same. Indeed, sports are a competitive pastime that frequently involve frustration and even outright hostility. In knowing how tense this environment can often be, I believe it is important our state takes steps to ensure the protection of sports officials. More often than not, these individuals bear the majority of abuse in our sporting events, and, in current Ohio statute, are afforded minimal protections.

Ohio Revised Code section 2903.13 generally specifies that the crime of assault is a first degree misdemeanor. However, 2903.13(A)(4)(d) of that section increases the penalty to a fifth degree felony if the victim of the assault is a school teacher, administrator or bus driver either on school grounds or who is targeted while acting in their official capacity. This legislation provides an identical level of protection to sports referees who are targeted in retaliation for their work while engaged as an athletic official.

My son Greg is currently a Double-A Minor League baseball umpire. While working as an OHSAA certified umpire, he has had his car blocked in and confronted by an angry coach while in the act of performing his duties. We, as a society, encourage athletic activity as a character building exercise that inspires teamwork and camaraderie between our youth. There is simply no place for violence against the officials that put so much time and effort into making sports a fun, safe and worthwhile environment to participate in. We hope that this provision is never utilized as players, coaches, parents and spectators recognize the increased consequences of their actions and better control their behavior.

I want to thank Representative Miller, a referee himself, for his joint sponsorship of HB 208, as well as this committee for taking the time to consider this important issue. I would ask that you hold your questions until after Representative Miller's testimony, whereupon we will both be available to answer any and all of your concerns.

