

For consideration in HB 208 Sports Official Proponent Testimony Information

Thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony in support of the passage of HB208. My name is Richard Hanna and I have been a certified soccer referee in the State of Ohio for 45 years. I have refereed youth, scholastic, collegiate and professional soccer for 49 years and as you might have guessed, I have seen many changes to this game that I love. Unfortunately, the most dominant change that I have seen recently is the decline of respect for officials.

Personally, I have been physically assaulted (sucker punched by a fan), had fingers poked in my chest, received verbal threats and offers to "meet me in the parking lot after the game and we'll settle this". I have had rocks thrown at my car as I left parking lots, been followed out of town by irate fans and two seasons ago had a woman beat on my driver's side window demanding that I step out of my car and explain why I made a certain call that caused her daughter's team to lose the game. I have endured filthy-mouthed parents that have no filters on what they say, who they say it to or who is around to hear their tirades, including their own children. To the players, most are truly embarrassed of what comes out of their parent's mouths and often try and stop the verbal abuse.

My own son, bother and grandson quit the game for one reason--the behavior of the parents/fans. My 16 year old grandson was forced to terminate a U12 soccer match because the parents of the losing team would not, after repeated requests stop, end the harassment. He was literally afraid for his safety to allow the game to continue under the circumstances. The visiting coach had to escort my grandson to his car after seeing that three of the losing team's fathers were following my grandson into the parking lot. The police were called and thankfully were there in minutes to settle the parents down.

I wish I could say that people's behavior is getting better on the fields and courts but I just don't see it. As officials, we are taught to ignore the loud mouthed, trash talking fans, because we know they are always going to be at every event. Horror stories about referee abuse are in the news and on social media every day. We need to send a clear message to everyone that this can and will no longer be tolerated. That is way I am pleading with you to pass HB 208.

Thank you again for allowing me to share some personal examples of referee abuse. I hope that this will help the House to get a clear picture of just what is going on on our athletic fields today.

Respectfully,

Richard M. Hanna  
3116 7th Street  
Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44221  
(330)928.5880  
[rchanna70@att.net](mailto:rchanna70@att.net)

