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**State Senator Kristina Roegner**

Ohio's 27th Senate District

Sponsor Testimony

Senate Bill 118

Senate Judiciary Committee

April 10, 2019

Chair Eklund, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 118, which enhances protections for Ohio sports officials. SB118 will protect referees, umpires and sports officials from assault by disgruntled spectators and athletes.

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 or administrator either on school grounds or who is targeted while acting in his or her official capacity. This legislation simply provides an identical level of protection to sports referees who are targeted in retaliation for their work while engaged as an athletic official.

I was moved to introduce this legislation after meeting with a pair of referees from my district, Andy Milligan and Michael Porpora. These two individuals shared concerns and compelling statistics about increased aggressive conduct toward sports officials taking place at local sporting events, noting that the law does not adequately protect sports officials who are fulfilling their occupational responsibilities. Referees who are simply doing their job on the court or field should not be

subjected to physical retaliation on the part of fans or players and deserve the same protections as school officials who are serving the school in other capacities.

The Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) recently penned a similar letter to parents in Ohio requesting better behavior at high school sports events, noting that more than 75% of high school officials report that “adult behavior” is the primary reason they quit.<sup>1</sup> Following this story, the Washington Post cited an OHSAA report showing that the number of baseball umpires in Ohio has decreased by about 18% and the number of football officials had decreased by about 11% since 2011.<sup>2</sup> This is despite the number of high school athletes in Ohio during the same period increasing by almost 6%. We are truly losing good referees and sports officials across the state because of senseless aggression on the part of spectators and players. This legislation will help address this problem and send a strong message to the bad actors across the state that aggressive behavior against our sports officials will not be tolerated.

Ohio’s sports officials and referees deserve full protection for fulfilling their responsibilities both on the court and the field. According to the National Association of Sports Officials, 21 states have already passed similar legislation. SB 118 is a reasonable step toward addressing the responsibility of our state to provide these officials that layer of protection in Ohio as well. Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony. I would be happy to address any questions at this time.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ohsaa.org/news-media/articles/ArtMID/2006/ArticleID/421/From-The-NFHS-A-Message-to-Parents-of-Ohio-High-School-Athletes>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2019/01/16/ohio-high-school-referees-urge-parents-cool-it-attempt-stem-shortage/?utm\\_term=.b831c8c26903](https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2019/01/16/ohio-high-school-referees-urge-parents-cool-it-attempt-stem-shortage/?utm_term=.b831c8c26903)