

# From the Desk of Jerry Snodgrass

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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter to support passage of HB 492 that would require mental health education for coaches in the state of Ohio.

Having served as the Executive Director of the state's athletic association, the Ohio High School Athletic Association (commonly known by its acronym, "OHSAA") during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was put in a position of shutting down school sports in the state that affected nearly 350,000 student-athletes as well as an estimated 65,000 – 70,000 coaches. What transpired during the months that followed was the mental health impact it had on these students. This became so evident in the outcry to return sports to the schools – where they are organized and coaches are trained in a number of areas. However, what became *more* evident was the fact that few – if any – of these 65,000 – 70,000 coaches had any training whatsoever in dealing with the mental effects on student-athletes. Even with the return of school sports, mental stress that manifested itself on student-athletes remains at an all-time high. Yet, school coaches are ill-equipped to assist these student-athletes with these mental health challenges. Passage of HB 492 would provide necessary training for our coaches.

Ohio is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest of all states relative to the number of high schools, sports programs and student-athletes. With recent additions in high school sport offerings (girls' wrestling, cheer, boys' volleyball) this number is increasing considerably. During my 12 years employed at the OHSAA as an Assistant Commissioner and its Executive Director, I personally was responsible for overseeing "Coach Education" for its member school coaches. We were one of the first states to *require* coach education and eventually require it to be mandated and licensed through the Ohio Dept. of Education. During this time, we promoted additional requirements for "Concussion Education" (both for parents AND coaches), as well as "Sudden Cardiac Arrest Education. These additional requirements were implemented due to the rising incidence of concussions and sudden cardiac arrest. As mentioned earlier, with the increased attention on student-athlete mental health, it is my strong opinion education/training is necessary for coaches to deal with the increase in this area. While there are always challenges in mandates, these were seamlessly put in place due to cooperation with the Ohio Dept. of Education's licensing/permit requirements and oversight. I am very confident the same can occur with Mental Health Education/Training. Having worked directly with these mandates, I feel confident in expressing mandating this through HB 492 will also be seamless. Knowing the lengthy time frame required for the OHSAA to implement these changes on their own, I believe passage of HB 492 is of major importance.

Ohio can be proactive in its efforts to provide training for our coaches. We have been proactive in the past and I urge passage of HB 492 to keep us at the forefront of states offering education-based sports. Other states will certainly follow our lead; it is necessary and our student-athletes will benefit.

Thank you.

Jerry Snodgrass  
Former Executive Director & Assistant Commissioner  
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