

Madam Chair, Intro:

Greetings members of the committee, thank you for your time today and hearing us talk about why we support HB492. My name is Matt Triplet and I have been the head boy's lacrosse coach at St. Francis DeSales in Columbus for the last 18 years, prior to that I was an assistant coach for 5 years. For the last year I have been one of the team members behind HB492 along with people across the state representing multiple sports, all of us working with Representative Loychik and Representative Pavaliga. It is so important because our kids are in a state of crisis, they were in crisis prior to covid and the last two years exacerbated the negative mental health of our kids.

In the spring of 2018, our team had just won a state championship, my kids had nothing to worry about except having a great summer. Early that July I received a call that would change my life, the mother of one of my players called and was worried her son as being potentially suicidal. I always let my kids know that I was there for them, and they could talk to me if they ever needed help, but the problems were usually due to things like divorce, break ups, family member passing, things you would normally encounter in daily life. But this conversation was different.

Halfway through talking with him I realized I was in over my head but thankfully we were able to talk through everything and he is still here today. Later I thought "what if..." What if he were suicidal and what if I had said something that would trigger him. I decided to be proactive and get mental health training in case this happened again. Being one of the leaders within the local lacrosse community, I worked with ADAMH in Franklin County to set up training for all Central Ohio boys and girls high school head and assistant lacrosse coaches, roughly 300 of them.

There were roughly 300 invited, only 9 signed up. To me it was shocking because mental health had already been made personal, but that was a pattern I saw almost each time a child would make an attempt or do the unthinkable. Mental Health training was not important until it was made personal to that coach, but that's not the coach's fault. In Ohio we are required to have training for important things like first aid, concussion, and CPR to be certified to coach, yet I have relied upon my Mental Health training more in the last 24 months than all my other trainings combined over the last 23 years.

During covid school shutdowns, many coaches that declined training were calling me for help with their kids. In fact, I got one of those phone calls from a coach three weeks ago. In the media I was seeing more and more kids in Ohio and across the country taking their lives and it was almost the exact same pattern. The people around them said they didn't see the signs or saw them in hindsight and their coaches or school staff would get trained after the fact just in case it happens again. It was made personal to them. After a lot of research, hundreds of phone calls, and emails with athletic associations across the country, coaches, psychologists, doctors, and parents, we took the path to where we are today with HB492.

Teen suicides are at some of the highest rates ever, it's the 2nd leading cause of death in the ages 15-22. Hospital visits for teenage girls are up 51% and therapists are currently overwhelmed. 26% of teens have had suicidal thoughts...on a team of 50 kids, that's 13 of them.

We can get out in front of this before it's been made personal. We have training for everything from ankle sprains to how to handle parents, but nothing as it relates to the mental health of our athletes. Shouldn't we know what to do if a kid comes to one of us and says they don't feel like going on? Training doesn't call for coaches to be therapists nor do I want to be one, but we need coaches to understand the signs of what to look for but more importantly what to do and then hand it off to the experts. Just like an injury, do we call the parents, the trainer, or 911? This would be similar but instead of the trainer it's the school counselor or MH resource.

Coaches often don't know what resources are available. How many coaches have the suicide hotline saved in their phone if a kid needs immediate help? Teachers often get training like this as a part of their curriculum, coaches do not. There are roughly 75-80,000 high school coaches across all sports in Ohio, roughly 70-75% of those coaches are not teachers or in the building.

Why coaches? We often see a kid longer in a day than a teacher, an average practice lasts 2 hours while a class is maybe 40 minutes. We see the kids in the high stress situations as well as when they let their hair down and hang out with their friends, we can see their behavior patterns. Coaches are often mother and father figures for kids, and we are often together for the best and worst of times throughout high school.

There are great coaches out there but what about the coach that just graduated, and they don't understand the impact they could have on a kid, or that coach who is well intentioned but doesn't know what to do when a kid comes and asks for help, I was one of them. Once my team and parents knew I took the course, a number of them came forward and let me know what was happening with their child. Ending the stigma is not a catch phrase but an actionable item. It means being able to talk about these issues with someone and in my case the parents didn't feel comfortable talking until they knew I would listen and understand without judgment or prejudice.

Before you is an opportunity and another tool into the quiver to help combat the teen mental health crisis, Ohio would be the first in the country to pass legislation of this kind and many other states are currently watching. This bill won't solve the crisis, but it will certainly help. If you look in the seats behind me, the buttons being worn were made by a group of girls who are in support of this bill and wanted to help in any way they could, it's a simple gesture but it speaks volumes. Kids across the country are organizing their efforts to be peer responders with organizations like Morgan's Message and the 988 initiative. A young man in the Sycamore area started an initiative to bring awareness of the new 988 emergency mental health hotline, teams in all sports across the state have stickers on helmets and patches on uniforms to support his

efforts. These students that are doing this knowing that the bill will likely not help them due to timing and getting coaches trained, but they know this bill will help for generations to come.

In my lacrosse bag I carry 2 books, a lacrosse rule book, and my mental health training book from that first class. It's not because I was too lazy to take it out. I am deathly afraid that I will not have the resources if I am ever in this situation again. If you fail to wrap an ankle correctly a kid might need extra treatment to fix those issues. If you fail here, there is no extra treatment. This is life or death. Lindsay's Law was passed with a much smaller likelihood of occurrence but the same potential outcome.

You will hear from a father and a daughter in a few minutes that I connected with last weekend, and we'd never met before today. When I was asked to help find people for testimony that have experienced a mental health emergency, I only had to make 2 phone calls. Either I am the luckiest guy in the world or it's a real-world example of how wide spread this is and why coach training is needed.

For all of these reasons, I urge you to vote yes for HB492.

Thank you so much and I am available to take any questions.