

Testimony in support of: House Bill 492
Require school athletic coaches complete mental health training

Submitted by:
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To whom it may concern,

My name is Domenic Marzano. I am a History teacher and Head boys lacrosse coach at New Albany High School. Prior to New Albany, I have been a head lacrosse coach at the collegiate level for 10 years, the professional level for 4 years and have had the opportunity to help start youth programs throughout the state. In addition to lacrosse, I have coached basketball, soccer and baseball at the middle school level for 3 years. In all my experiences, one thing has always been consistent at every level, athletes go through mental health issues at varying degrees. Since the pandemic started, I have noticed a far greater number of athletes dealing with mental health issues. They have always been around, even when I played, but now more than ever our athletes need a coaches support. Our young people are at a tough time in their lives. Their last few years were suppose to be times of growth and excitement but it has actually been the opposite. The pandemic has changed the way everybody lives and its effects on our student athletes is very noticeable. They lost a season, could not hang out with their friends, wear masks everywhere, no homecomings, hybrid learning, risk of them or their loved ones getting sick! This has been anything but normal and coaches have the opportunity to help their athletes through times like these. Anxiety, depression and stress is noticeable for my students and players. I support HB492 because it is so needed at this moment to have coaches properly trained to help notice and identify mental health issues in their athletes. If I were not trained and experienced to handle these situations, I am not sure what the outcome would have been for some of the players that I have had to use that training with.

This April, we were coming off of a 4 game win streak and played a few bad games. Obviously, the team mood was not great! As we continued to practice during the week, I was making sure to check in with the players prior to practice on anything but lacrosse. Typically this takes some of the stress of underperforming off of the athlete (which is a strategy of one of my mental health training.) However, I could tell one of my players was not acting like himself. He was not as talkative during practice like usual, really bad posture on the field and in the locker room. After practice, I spoke with him to let him know that I would love to talk with him about a few things, not lacrosse. He met me the

next day in my room. He was visibly upset. I noticed that he wouldn't make eye contact with me, was picking his nails and wouldn't stop tapping his foot. The second we started talking about lacrosse, he became apologetic and was saying "I let the team down" and "We should have won but I didn't do my job. I am sorry I let you down." I am thankful that I have experience and training to notice these signs as indicators of possible mental health issues. His physical demeanor and apologetic attitude made me understand that this could be something much deeper than lacrosse performance. The conversation turned to anything but lacrosse. The next 45 minutes, we spoke about everything from academics, college, social circles and family. I am very happy that I had that time to speak with him because he opened up to me about things that I would never know were affecting him. We both agreed that he should take some time away from lacrosse to focus on some of his stressors but still continue to talk with each other. A week later, his parents emailed me with an update! The joint effort by me and his parents helped him go speak with a therapist. They identified that he was suffering from strong anxiety and depression issues that manifested from everything he was dealing with. In this case, lacrosse performance was the trigger. This is just one of the several instances in my experience that I have had to fall back on mental health training.

With that being said, I am very grateful that I have had the training and experience needed to help my athletes. I can only imagine being a young or inexperienced coach dealing with this. There has never been a more important time than right now to be aware and knowledgeable on these issues facing our athletes. Coaches cannot just wait for their experience to take care of their players, we all need the training. You never know when it will effect you until it does. In most cases, our athletes don't have time for us to gain experience. They need us right now. HB 492 is a no brainer and should be a common practice across the country.

Thanks,

Domenic Marzano