



Senate Judiciary  
Committee

Witness Form

Today's Date 4-4-22

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Organization Representing: Soccer officials

Testifying on Bill Number: HB 44

Testimony:  Verbal  Written  Both

Testifying As:  Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Are you a Registered Lobbyist?  Yes  No

Special Requests: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Proponent Testimony for HB 44 (Sports Officials Assault)

Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on 04/05/2022

Presented by: Andy Milligan

Chairman Manning, Vice Chairman McColley, Ranking Member Thomas and members of this committee...

It has now been 3 years since we started this process during a meeting with Senator Roegner to ask her for help to address the growing cases of assault on sports officials.

Over the course of these last 3 years, we have had many positive outcomes as a result of bringing this legislation forward.

For example, many youth athletic associations across the state are taking a proactive stance by implementing a no-tolerance policy when it comes to menacing or assaulting sports officials. Additionally, US Soccer and the National Federation of High School sports have championed all-out 'Respect the Referee' campaigns to help bring light to the ill-effects that assaulting a sports official has on the individuals involved.

When we began this process, there were 21 states with legislation specifically designed to address assault on sports officials and now there are 23. Currently, there

are an additional 5 states that have pending legislation including Tennessee and Minnesota which have just started similar efforts since the beginning of this year.

Throughout this legislative process, we have also addressed the concerns of those parties that initially opposed our efforts.

For example, I learned that there is a standing perception that additional criminal penalties has an indisparate impact on minorities so I began my own research to see if this is actually true. Interestingly enough, according to statistics from the Ohio High School Athletic Association, 80% of the documented cases were 'white-on-white' assaults. Conversely, the 'minority-on-white' assault cases accounted for only 19% of the total. After sharing this data with the Ohio House, this bill passed by an 80-9 vote. There were only 9 dissenting votes.

We were also opposed by the Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association. Through the leadership of Representative Seitz, we were able to modify the presumptive sentencing terms to give more leeway to the judges when it came to the penalty phase.

Despite these positive impacts and public awareness that our efforts have brought forward, we are still seeing weekly media reports about sports officials being menaced and assaulted.

With the ever-increasing number of sporting events growing in Ohio, I believe that the repercussions of inaction on this bill would lead to fewer individuals interested in officiating.

Please recall from my prior testimony that the #1 reason why sports officials quit is due to spectator menacing and assault. Also note that the average age of a new referee is 14 years old which means that this bill is as much about protecting children as it is about protecting adults.

I urge you to pass this bill as I believe that it is a modest, balanced, bi-partisan legislation that will preserve the future of youth sports in Ohio. This will also give our partners at the Ohio High School Athletic Association the backing they need to implement an ejected spectator suspension policy that will also serve to curtail future cases of assault on sports officials.