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Chairwoman Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and to all of the members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, I would like to thank you for allowing me to testify today.

My name is John Graceffo, and I am an attorney here in Columbus. I have the honor and privilege to represent Mr. Wiley Butler, who is here with me this afternoon. The Committee will hear from Mr. Butler shortly, but please allow me to introduce him to you.

On April 18, 2023, Mr. Butler was the victim of a physical assault perpetrated by an individual named Gregory Roudabush. My client was officiating a softball game at Berliner Park, which is the largest ball diamond complex in the country. Just last month, the 2023 National Senior Games Softball Championship was played at Berliner Park. 95 teams, with more than 1,500 athletes, came from around the country to play for the Championship. It was estimated that the event attracted 2,500 visitors, spending an estimated \$2.4 million dollars in visitor spending. Of course, all of those games need to be officiated.

Mr. Butler has been an umpire with Columbus Recreation and Parks for over 17 years. He's always enjoyed giving back to the game he's played and loved, and the game of April 18 started out as any other. He was umpiring the game as he had always, which from time to time requires that he direct the catcher to move a bit to either side so that he can see the plate, and call balls and strikes. This positioning depends on the batter – lefty or righty.

Immediately before the assault, Gregory Roudabush was playing in the catcher position, and Mr. Butler, as he always had, directed Mr. Roudabush to move. Mr. Roudabush apparently didn't like being told what to do, and he became verbally abusive to Mr. Butler. My client put up with that for a bit, but when Mr. Roudabush didn't stop, Mr. Butler decided "enough is enough", and ejected Mr. Roudabush from the game.

Mr. Roudabush then struck my client in the face, and threw him to the ground right on top of home plate. Thankfully, other players were able to separate the two men. Mr. Roudabush has been permanently banned from Columbus Rec and Parks games; he has yet to answer to the criminal charges against him, and he currently has an active Warrant for his arrest.

Since Mr. Butler suffered that unprovoked attack, he has stopped umpiring games.

Unfortunately, Mr. Butler isn't the only sports official who has stopped their service. The National Federation of State High School Associations estimates that 50,000 individuals have discontinued their service since the 2018-2019 season. This dramatic decrease in available officials threatens amateur sports at all levels, and the Ohio High School Athletic Association is actively taking steps to remedy this problem.

I have provided this Honorable Committee with a map from the National Association of Sports Officials that visually describes State by State legislation regarding sports officials as victims.



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You will see that there currently 16 States that have no specific legislation, with the great State of Ohio providing limited liability.

This liability, at least criminally, is of course codified in ORC 2903.13. As proposed, HB 139 would provide for enhancing an assault on a sports official to a Felony of the 5th Degree (if the defendant has a prior conviction of the same nature), and would impose mandatory penalties on those convicted of a 1st time offense of this nature.

I hope, not only for Mr. Butler, but for all other sports officials in Ohio, that this legislation if enacted, would act as a deterrent to all players and fans, and send a message that this conduct will not be tolerated, and that we will protect our sports officials.

I know that my initial time is limited, but I respectfully urge this Honorable Committee to pass this legislation. Thank you for your time, and I will be happy to answer any questions you have.