



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. I am the Managing Partner of Amerileagues. We have operated youth sports leagues in Cincinnati for over 10 years. We have over 3000 teams and approximately 30,000 children that participate in our leagues. During basketball season, we hold over 1200 games per weekend and we have a roster of over 650 officials.

Over the last several years, assaults against the officials have increased at an alarming rate. Officials are leaving the profession, due to concerns over their personal safety, at a rate outpacing the recruitment of new officials. If this trend continues

For perspective, a youth sporting event lacks the staffing that provides protection for the officials that is present at a high school event. At a high school event, typically, administrators, athletic directors, and police officers are in attendance to manage the event. Locker rooms are provided for the officials to provide a safe place for the officials to retreat to during and after a game. At the typical youth sports event, none of the aforementioned support staff are present neither is a place for retreat, which exposes the officials to negative behavior.

Over the years, behavior has escalated. Officials have been attacked on the court during and after a game, in hallways, and in the parking lot. We are averaging around 10 incidences per year. When we investigate, the common sentiment is "the official deserved it". The perpetrators think they are in the right because they are "protecting their children" when they disagree with a call. Bad actors come for all walks of life. We have expelled doctors, business leaders, teachers, lawyers, school superintendents, and even police officers. In our leagues, the age group with the highest incidents is 3rd grade.

Our attempts to combat the bad behavior include stricter rules with enhanced penalties, increasing officials' compensation, mandating gym monitors, and using off duty police officers. An example, we instituted a rule where if a parent was suspended their player would be suspended for the same amount of time, which has received great support from our School Coordinators. The rule has been effective in curbing behavior in the stands between opposing parent groups,



However, it has not been effective in curbing behavior toward the officials particularly after a game where fans believe our rules are no longer in effect. Certain fans believe this bad behavior is part of the game. We are told by fans that they can say and act however they want after they pay the entry fee, which is \$3.00.

The fan expects and demand perfection from the officials, an unattainable standard for any profession. One main cause of the frustration is that the typical fan does not understand the rules or how to interpret the rules at game speed. Imagine you are a doctor and your patient verbally and physically assaults you because they disagree with your diagnosis which differs than what they found from a quick Google search. Just because one plays a sport does not mean they know the rules any more than a Google search makes one a physician.

An official accepts that 50% of the crowd will disagree with ever single call they make, which makes this job difficult. The onslaught of verbal abuse including threat of violence is not accepted but unfortunately has become the norm. Add in the acts of violence and you can understand the safety concerns.

We have done everything we can do short of banning all fans from the games, a tactic which some leagues around the United States employ. The fans that behave look to us to mitigate the issue but we have reached the limit of our authority. Nothing we could ever enact will have the impact of H.B. 139. We need your help in protecting the officials and the players, who are the unintended victims. H.B. 139 will provide accountability to those who choose to assault an official and serve as a deterrent for everyone else.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any question the committee may have.