

Good afternoon.

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 Carl Mussenden, a resident of Delaware, OH.

I am testifying in support of H.B. 139 and the proposed amendments to R.C. 2903.13 that seek to increase assault penalties if a victim is a sports official.

I am in a unique position to have observed soccer matches from four (4) different perspectives:

a player, parent, coach and official.

I was a youth and high school soccer player in the 1980's.

I am a father of two daughters who competed on travel soccer teams for 9+ years.

I am a licensed youth travel soccer coach of over 15 years; and

I am a dually licensed United States Soccer Federation soccer official and Ohio High School Athletic Association Class 1 soccer official of 23 years.

To put this into perspective, I have:

- played in over 100 soccer games,
- watched over 1000 professional, collegiate and youth games,
- coached over 400 soccer games, and

- officiated over 2000 soccer games.

My testimony today is not intended to denounce all youth and high school soccer matches, or to 'drag through the mud' the tenor of every adult attending these games. On the contrary, I am here today to protect what is known worldwide as the 'Beautiful game.'

Over the last 4 decades, I have observed 100's of amazing games played, phenomenal coaching, wonderful parents, and camaraderie among players where their relationships have lasted beyond the playing fields. The core of why I remain involved is directly related to the great bonds I developed over the years.

Conversely, a major issue plaguing youth soccer and all sports, is the behavior towards sports officials. Most of us in this room today recall the legendary Indiana University basketball coach, Bobby Knight, when old videos show him ranting on sidelines and throwing chairs on the court over a disputed call by the officials.

Sadly, at some level, television sensationalized this horrible behavior. Perhaps it even translated it to a point where it became acceptable. Even worse, it has become acceptable at the youth sports level. More so, I have been on the receiving end.

As the saying goes, a few bad apples ruin the bunch. I have been the direct recipient of being threatened with bodily harm,

surrounded by irate players, coaches who have made reference to impacting my daughters' livelihoods, and countless water bottles and other items been tossed at me from behind my back. Once last year, I approached an Athletic Director of a prominent high school in central Ohio seeking help and protection from fans at 'his' high school stadium. He offered us zero support, turned his back on our entire referee crew and began berating each of us.

As a referee, we are taught to not have 'rabbit ears' by listening & reacting to everything that is said. We are also taught to attempt to bring the 'temperature down' during games. We follow clear guidelines, akin to how schoolteachers administer progressive discipline: ask, tell, dismiss.

Also as a referee, we hold ourselves accountable to being able to physically, mentally and emotionally handle the rigors of officiating these games. A mentor of mine once said, "Read the room, Carl. Do what's best for that game." This is to say, safety is paramount above all else. In doing so, officiate a match as if you were a conductor of a symphony. You are not the one making the music but the one orchestrating the players, coaches and parents such that the 'symphony' is played to its finest.

I, as an official, continue to be impacted by those who misbehave during and after these games where my well-being is at stake. While I understand there are existing laws in the Ohio Revised Code that may parallel the legislation proposed by Representative Joe Miller and Representative Bill Roemer, laws

that uniquely speak to protecting a specific entity like sports officials, send a clear message that umpires and referees are to be protected and there is a clear consequence if they are not.

Thank you for your time and I will be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully,

Carl Mussenden  
Ohio High School Athletic Association  
Class 1 Soccer Official  
United States Soccer Federation  
Grassroots Soccer Official