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Committees:
Local Government - *Vice Chair*
JCARR - *Vice Chair*
Finance
General Government
Rules and Reference
Judiciary

Theresa Gavarone
Majority Whip
2nd District

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide sponsor testimony for Senate Bill 259. Senate Bill 259 will allow for high school students to transfer schools and play high school athletics right away, rather than sit out a portion of the season, if they have been victims of bullying, harassment or more.

I drafted this bill in response to the conviction of a former Bowling Green High School coach on 19 charges, including rape, sexual battery and gross sexual imposition. When I learned that the victims in this case, some of whom are all-state level players fighting for potential college scholarships, would now be forced to play sports at the school where the abuse occurred or sit out portions of the upcoming season as a result of them transferring schools, I was appalled. Victims of such abuse should not be forced to endure further suffering by being required to play sports at the same school or be obligated to sit out after transferring.

This bill, which applies to K-12 students at both public and private, chartered, non-chartered schools and home-schooled students as well, will allow victimized students to transfer their athletic eligibility to another district or school without forfeiting a portion of the athletic season.

This bill will apply to any student who has been the victim of:

1. Harassment, intimidation, or bullying
2. An offense of violence
3. A violation of state importuning law
4. An attempt to commit an offense of violence or to violate state importuning law
5. Conduct by a school official, employee or volunteer that violates the Licensure Code of Professional Conduct for Ohio Educators developed by the State Board of Education.

To be a qualifying offense under this bill, the individual alleged to commit an offense of violence, importuning, or both must have also been charged, indicted, convicted, or pled guilty to committing the offense.

There are also provisions in the bill, such as prohibiting that school districts and interscholastic conferences:

1. Require a student who is eligible to participate in athletics under the bill to meet requirements that conflict with the bill
2. Penalize or restrict eligibility to participate in athletics of a student who transfers schools during the year under this bill.

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Sports play such a huge role in the development of our kids. It teaches them accountability, leadership, teamwork and much more. Not permitting students who have been victims of abuse the opportunity to do so is flat out-wrong. Protecting our children must be our highest priority in order to ensure our families, and our state, have a bright future.

Thank you again for allowing me to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 259, and I welcome any questions.