



Representative Bill Roemer
District 31

House Judiciary Committee
House Bill 79 Sponsor Testimony
March 5, 2025

Chairman Thomas, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn and members of the House Judiciary Committee. I appreciate this opportunity to come before you, along with my colleague Representative Joe Miller, to deliver sponsor testimony in support of House Bill 79. This bill was previously considered as House Bill 139 during the last General Assembly, where it received strong bipartisan support and overwhelmingly passed the House. We are reintroducing this legislation as it did not make it through the Senate before the end of the 135th General Assembly, we still believe strongly that these reforms can and will make a difference in protecting sports officials from undue harm.

As many of you may know, I have coached baseball for 28 years, and have personally played baseball, football and basketball for decades. In coaching and playing over a thousand games, I have never received a red card, been ejected, or received even a technical foul. Many of those involved in sports throughout our state and country cannot say the same. Indeed, sports are a competitive pastime that frequently involve frustration and even outright hostility. In knowing how tense this environment can often be, I believe it is important our state takes steps to ensure the protection of sports officials. More often than not, these

individuals bear the majority of abuse in our sporting events, and, in current Ohio statute, are afforded minimal protections.

The Ohio Revised Code generally specifies that the crime of assault is a first degree misdemeanor. However, 2903.13(A)(4)(d) of that section increases the penalty to a fifth degree felony if the victim of the assault is a school teacher, administrator or bus driver either on school grounds or who is targeted while acting in their official capacity. This legislation adds a mandatory \$1,500 fine and 40 hours of community service for committing misdemeanor assault against sports officials who are targeted in retaliation for their work while engaged as an athletic official. In addition, subsequent offenses would be elevated to a fifth degree felony, in harmony with the protections I mentioned that already exist for school employees. These changes were developed based upon extensive input in the last General Assembly, including that from Representatives Seitz, Grendell, and Lang.

My son Greg was a Double-A Minor League baseball umpire. While working as an OHSAA certified umpire, he at 16 years old had his car blocked in and was confronted by an angry coach while in the act of performing his duties. We, as a society, encourage athletic activity as a character building exercise that inspires teamwork and camaraderie between our youth. There is simply no place for violence against the officials that put so much time and effort into making sports a fun, safe and worthwhile environment to participate in. We hope that this provision is never utilized as players, coaches, parents and spectators recognize the increased consequences of their actions and better control their behavior.

I want to thank Representative Miller, a referee himself, for his joint sponsorship of HB 79, as well as this committee for taking the time to consider this important issue. I would ask that you hold your questions until after Representative Miller's testimony, whereupon we will both be available to answer any and all of your concerns.