



Chairman Thomas, Vice Chair Matthews, Ranking Member Isaccsohn, and to all of the members of the House Criminal Judiciary 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 12 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 720 officials.

Over the last several years, we have witnessed assaults against the officials increasing 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. We have lost approximately 30% of our official since 2020. It is getting to the point where we are having to choose which games will have officials.

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. 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 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

The fan expects and demands 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. They view the game myopically and lose the perspective that this is just a game for children. In short, the games become too emotional for many fans.



An official accepts that 50% of the crowd will disagree with every single call they make, which makes this job difficult. What we cannot accept is the harassment and acts of violence. We instructed the officials not to give their names to protect them from being harassed and threatened on social media and to keep fans from finding out where they live. Over the years, officials have had their property vandalized and destroyed. They also had their family members harassed and threatened.

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. The only effective strategy is to increase the penalty for bad behavior. For example, we instituted a rule where if a parent is suspended their associated player is also suspended for the same amount of time. 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.

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. 79. The current law is no longer an effective deterrent. We need your help in protecting the officials and the children, who are the unintended victims. H.B. 79 will provide accountability to those who choose to assault an official and serve as an effective deterrent for everyone else.

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