



**House Judiciary Committee
Proponent Testimony on HB 79
Ohio High School Athletic Association
March 19, 2025**

Chairman Thomas, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Beau Rugg and I'm the Director of Officiating and Football Administrator for the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA). The bill under consideration is one that passed this committee in the prior session with bipartisan support and passed a vote in the full house with bipartisan support as well. It is our hope that the same thing will happen in this session, and that we can make this bill a law. I want to thank Representatives Roemer and Miller for bringing HB 79 forward for consideration.

Unfortunately, assaults on officials have been on the rise. I began my role as the Director of Officiating at OHSAA in 2012. In the first 5 years of my tenure, we had zero reported instances of physical abuse against an official. Now we are averaging 2 physical confrontations with officials per season.

This may seem like a small number given the thousands of games that occur every year, but the trend is alarming. The National Association of Sports Officials completed a robust national survey with nearly 36,000 respondents nationally in 2023. An alarming piece of data from this survey indicated that 13% of officials were assaulted by either a fan, coach or player. The number one reason people leave officiating is due to physical and verbal abuse. We do not want game opportunities for our youth in Ohio canceled due to a shortage of officials.

The lack of respect for officials is at an all-time high. Perfection is the perceived standard, and if you do not meet it, ridicule, harassment, and even assault are the consequences. This legislation will help spotlight that this type of behavior is not acceptable. Teachers, administrators, and bus drivers already receive this type of additional protection through legislation. We are hopeful that officials will be shown the same courtesy and respect. At least 24 other states already have legislation like this on the books, and Ohio would be a welcome addition to the group. Protecting officials in Ohio is protecting athletic opportunities for the youth in Ohio.

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