



Joe Miller
State Representative House District 53

I would like to reiterate Representative Roemer's thanks to Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, ranking Member Hick-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee for this opportunity to give sponsor testimony on House Bill 139.

This legislation is vitally important to protect sports officials in Ohio and ensure that we can recruit and retain the next generation of football officials, soccer referees, baseball umpires, and everything in between.

This is a topic that is close to my heart. I am currently in my 23rd year as a basketball referee and have past experience officiating other sports as well. In addition, I have served in the roles of a coach, a parent watching in the stands, and as a student athlete myself. With this, I can draw from the different vantage points competition provides, and understand the tremendous benefits of playing sports. That is why it is imperative for us to maintain a safe and welcoming environment for everyone involved.

As my joint sponsor discussed, HB 139 brings the penalty for assaulting a sports official closer in line to the same protection afforded to bus drivers, teachers and administrators. It also brings Ohio up to speed with 21 other states that have some type of additional protection for sports officials against assault.

Why are so many states around the country taking action on this issue? Because this issue impacts all demographics -- as many of our officials who have asked for this protection are both male & female, white, brown & black, and come from both rural areas as well as the inner city. But one of the biggest reasons is the dwindling pool of qualified officials. The Ohio High School Athletic Association has decried the "alarming shortage" of high school officials, primarily because four out of five new officials don't stick around for more than two years. Of those that quit, 75 percent cited "adult behavior" as their primary motivation for leaving.

Ohio needs to do more to protect our officials and avoid this looming crisis before referee shortages become a major obstacle for scheduling sporting events. HB 139 sends an unmistakable message that we will not tolerate the assault of sports officials. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and my joint sponsor and I would be glad to field any questions.

