

Testimony in Support of H7003: Anti-Hazing Policy In Student Athletics

To: House Committee on Education

From: Lauren Matlach

Date: February 23, 2026

I am writing to you today as a parent and a lifelong athlete to express my support for H7003.

This past winter, my daughter signed up for the local basketball team. Each weekend, she smiles as she runs up and down the court and cheers her friends from the sidelines. Her team reminds me of what sports are at their absolute best: an opportunity to make new friends, a safe place to learn from failure, and a celebration of persistence and growth, where each event ends looking your opponent in the eye and shaking their hand.

However, I am also acutely aware of the darker side of athletics, where otherness and bullying take hold to create toxic environments. As a high school athlete on Long Island in the early 2000s, I saw firsthand how the Mepham High School hazing scandal rocked the entire region. Even as an athlete in a different sport and a neighboring community, I felt the ripple effects of that culture—the realization that without clear oversight and explicit boundaries from adults, locker rooms and other places can quickly transform from spaces of mentorship into spaces of trauma.

This bill would ensure that every player and coach understands the rules of the game before the first whistle blows. Accountability for hazing is non-negotiable, but for that to happen, expectations need to be explicitly defined and communicated from day one. By mandating this transparency, H7003 protects the integrity of the team and sport and ensures that the focus remains on character and competition rather than fear or intimidation.

I want my daughter to continue benefitting from all sports have to offer, and I believe this legislation is a first step to ensuring all students have a positive sports experience. I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this measure.