

March 10, 2026

The Honorable Joseph McNamara
Rhode Island House Education Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Dear Chairman McNamara and members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Dino Campopiano, and I have had the privilege of coaching high school football for the past 30 years. I have watched countless young athletes grow through this game — learning discipline, teamwork, and resilience on our field. I write to you today in strong and enthusiastic support of House Bill H 7115, which would require all students participating in Rhode Island interscholastic league football to wear impact-reducing soft-shell helmet covers.

Every time one of my players buckled his chin strap and took the field, I carried the weight of his safety alongside him. Football is a physical game, and despite tremendous advances in helmet technology over the decades, head injuries and concussions remain a persistent and serious concern. The soft-shell helmet cover addresses this directly by adding a critical secondary layer of padded protection to the outside of the traditional hard-shell helmet, designed specifically to absorb and dissipate the force of collisions that our players experience on every single play.

I have seen firsthand what a concussion does to a young athlete — the weeks of missed school, the headaches, the anxiety, and in some cases, the decision never to return to the sport they love. If this technology can meaningfully reduce the incidence and severity of those injuries, we have a moral obligation to put it on every helmet in Rhode Island. This bill does exactly that.

As much as I believe in the value of this technology, I am equally compelled by what this bill represents for fairness and equity across our state. Here is a reality that many people outside of coaching may not fully appreciate: not every school program operates on equal footing.

In more affluent communities, booster clubs, generous athletics budgets, and engaged donor bases allow coaching staffs to invest in the latest protective equipment. Some of my colleagues at programs with sufficient athletics funded budgets have already begun equipping their players with soft-shell helmet covers. Their kids are playing with an added layer of protection that the kids at under-resourced schools simply do not have access to — not because their parents care any less, or because their coaches are any less committed to safety, but because the money is not there.

That disparity is unacceptable. A student-athlete at a school in a lower-income community deserves exactly the same level of protection as a student-athlete at a school with a well-funded athletics department. H 7115 levels that playing field in the most important way possible — by mandating that school districts furnish these devices to every participating student at no cost to

the family. This provision ensures that zip code does not determine the quality of protection a young player receives when he or she suits up to play the game of football.

For families in lower-income communities especially, the assurance that this equipment will be furnished by the school district removes yet another barrier. Parents should not have to choose between their child's passion and concern for their safety, nor should they bear an additional financial burden to access the same standard of protection available at a wealthier school across town.

The bill is also carefully constructed. The opt-out provision respects the rights of parents and guardians to make decisions for their children, while still establishing a strong default standard of protection for all players. The Rhode Island Interscholastic League's role in developing rules, regulations, and standards ensures that devices will be appropriate, consistent, and properly

Coaching football is one is a privilege I never took lightly. During my years as a head coach my players trusted me with their development, and their families trusted me with their safety. H 7115 is a meaningful, equitable, and practical step toward honoring that trust — protecting every player on every field, regardless of the community they come from.

I urge this committee to support this legislation. Our student athletes deserve nothing less.

Dino Campopiano

Athletic Director

City of Pawtucket