

Good Morning-

I am writing in reference to "Bill to Protect Sports Officials in Rhode Island. This is my seventh year as a youth, high school, and college referee. I officiate field hockey, basketball, and women's lacrosse. In my tenure as an official I have endured criticism, taunting, threats, and more from players and coaches, but especially by parents and fans. At games, I have been required to park, to enter and to exit separately from spectators, to always stay with my partner (including trips to the restroom) because the culture of sports has allowed for critics to verbally and physically attack referees. Because of threats from parents, game management (when on-site) has escorted spectators off of school property because of threatening behavior. On several occasions, my partner and I have been escorted to our vehicles after games because of game management's fear for our safety. For about \$100 for a varsity game, the stress and anxiety that comes with officiating has significantly reduced the number of people willing to risk personal safety. There are certain schools where spectators are well known for poor behavior in the stands, and although RILL has tightened penalties for poor behavior, it does not eliminate the risks officials take trying to maintain safety and consistency on the field or the court.

When I first began officiating I had much to learn and a new referee is the most vulnerable because he or she does not always have the confidence or experience to handle unruly situations on and off the field, which sadly has become part of sports today. On many occasions, I became physically sick to my stomach on the way to games because of how poor spectator behavior often is. It is far more commonplace to receive criticism rather than thanks from players, fans, and coaches. This past field hockey season, a varsity coach literally ran after my partner and me as we were exiting the field to accost us with accusations of impropriety. The incident was reported and the coach was held responsible for her actions, but the confrontation still occurred. What kind of message are we sending to student athletes if poor behavior is tolerated? Isn't sportsmanship at the center of competition?

Sadly, the acceptance of poor behavior at sporting events has even carried over to youth officials who have been heckled by adult spectators, causing many children to look elsewhere for safer and less confrontational employment. Simply put, no one likes to get yelled at, chased, or threatened at what is often a second job for most adult officials who are involved for the love of the game.

It is critical that you pass this bill and send a strong message to all stakeholders that enough is enough. This ill behavior toward sports' officials must end now before others are hurt. Bring back high standards for all involved in youth sports.

Respectfully,

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