

February 10, 2026

House of Representatives  
State of Rhode Island General Assembly  
One Capitol Hill  
Providence, RI 02908

Re: Rhode Island House Bill H-7549

Dear Chairwoman McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Michael Schmitt, President of the Rhode Island Hockey Officials Association, and I support this bill as proposed.

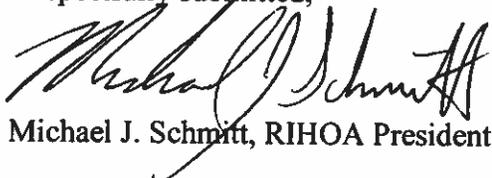
Abuse of youth sports officials is a critical issue. Every season is characterized by high attrition rates caused mostly by increasingly aggressive behavior from adult participants and spectators. Despite recruitment numbers that are rebounding in some areas, the severity and frequency of abuse remain major deterrents for newer, younger referees to join and for our veteran officials to return year after year as well.

I believe that the bill before you today will help reverse the trend of violence by providing some noticeable teeth to the “Zero Tolerance” initiatives that many of our arenas and sports fields throughout the state have already adopted. My hope is that proactive initiatives led by organizations combined with league imposed stricter measures will combat these trends before requiring additional legal consequences.

Officials and coaches of youth sports are required to complete Safe Sport Training as a part of our annual certifications, and we applaud the efforts that many organizations and leagues are taking to mitigate the verbal abuse often heard by parents, spectators and at times the coaches and players themselves. It is most disturbing when verbal abuse turns into threats of bodily violence, or worse, physical assault.

As a society, we must ask ourselves, “what are we teaching our children?” Youth sports are about instilling positive values and developing traits that foster discipline, teamwork, resilience, leadership, and responsibility. Violence has no place within this experience for our young athletes, and House bill 7549 will help make that a reality.

Respectfully submitted,



Michael J. Schmitt, RIHOA President