



**American
Heart
Association.**

March 11, 2026

The Honorable Hanna Gallo
Senate Committee on Education
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

SUBJECT: Support for Senate Bill 2079

Dear Chair Gallo and Members of the Committee:

The American Heart Association would like to voice support for S. 2079, AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION -- HEALTH AND SAFETY OF PUPILS, by Senator Tikoian, and we thank the committee for the opportunity to submit testimony. This vital legislation would strengthen cardiac emergency preparedness in high schools and middle schools and at school athletic venues and events across the state.

BACKGROUND

More than 356,000 people experience cardiac arrest outside of a hospital in the United States each year.ⁱ Without the proper response from people nearby, 90% of these incidents will result in death.ⁱⁱ It is estimated that more than 23,000 children under the age of 18 experience cardiac arrest outside of a hospital annually in the United Statesⁱⁱⁱ and 40% of these incidents are sports-related.^{iv}

Sudden cardiac arrest is the leading cause of death in young athletes. It doesn't have to be, though. Appropriate emergency response tools, like a Cardiac Emergency Response Plan (CERP) or athletic Emergency Action Plan (EAP), laypeople trained in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), and ready access to Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) can raise survival rates by 50% or more.^v In schools with AEDs, approximately 70% of children survive cardiac arrest – seven times the overall survival rate for children.

RHODE ISLAND CONTEXT

S. 2079 builds upon an existing Rhode Island law that requires high schools and middle schools to maintain on-site AEDs. The AED requirement is important, but it's not enough. We need to ensure plans are in place and staff are prepared to act in the event of a cardiac arrest when an immediate response is critical. The safety of students, student athletes, school staff, visitors and spectators can be enhanced with a coordinated, practiced response plan where CERP/EAP teams are trained and empowered to administer lifesaving care until Emergency Medical Services (EMS) arrive on scene.

The Rhode Island Interscholastic League has also been proactive in some areas including requiring CPR/AED certification for coaches and recommending athletic EAPs for member schools, further establishing a solid foundation for this legislation.

NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Many states that have passed legislation like S. 2079 have done so in response to a tragedy. 27 states currently have similar requirements for school athletics and 23 have requirements for school buildings. Today, this committee can save lives by proactively strengthening the safety net for our school communities. By passing this bill, you will close critical gaps and better position Rhode Island to respond to cardiac emergencies in schools and at school athletic venues and events across the state.

S. 2079 also signals our collective commitment to safeguarding lives through proven, achievable practices that empower communities to act quickly and confidently when seconds matter the most. When schools and athletic programs establish robust CERPs/EAPs and integrate lifesaving skills into everyday culture and life; students, coaches, educators, and others grow more resilient and prepared, and they gain the confidence needed to recognize and respond to cardiac arrest and other life-threatening emergencies – whether they're in school, on the basketball court, or at the grocery store.

Together, we are increasing the odds of survival and empowering Rhode Island students and school communities to become healthier, safer, and more responsive. We respectfully urge the committee to recommend passage of S. 2079.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Megan Tucker
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The American Heart Association is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. Heart disease is the No. 1 killer worldwide, and stroke ranks second globally. Even when those conditions don't result in death, they cause disability and diminish quality of life. We want to see a world free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke. Our mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives.

ⁱ Benjamin EJ, Virani SS, Callaway CW, Chamberlain AM, Chang AR, Cheng S, Chiuve SE, Cushman M, Delling FN, Deo R, de Ferranti SD. Heart disease and stroke statistics—2018 update: a report from the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2018 Mar 20;137(12):e67–492. Table 16-1.

ⁱⁱ Virani SS, Alonso A, Benjamin EJ, et al. Heart disease and stroke statistics—2020 update: a report from the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2020 Mar 3;E139–596.

ⁱⁱⁱ Okubo, M., Chan, H. K., Callaway, C. W., Mann, N. C., & Wang, H. E. (2020). Characteristics of pediatric out-of-hospital cardiac arrest in the United States. *Resuscitation*, 153, 227–233. doi.org/10.1016/j.resuscitation.2020.04.023

^{iv} Jayaraman R, Reinier K, Nair S, Aro AL, Uy-Evanado A, Rusinaru C, Stecker EC, Gunson K, Jui J, Chugh SS. Risk factors of sudden cardiac death in the young: multiple-year community-wide assessment. *Circulation*. 2018; 137:1561–1570. doi: 10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.117.031262.

^v Rose et al. Cardiac Emergency Response Planning for Schools: A Policy Statement. *NASN School Nurse*. 2016 31(5), 263–270. doi: 10.1177/1942602X16655839.