

March 11, 2026

The Honorable Hanna Gallo
Rhode Island Senate Education Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Dear Chairwoman Gallo and members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Blake Simpson, and I have the privilege of coaching high school football for the past decade. 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 Senate Bill S 2213, 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 buckles 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.

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 a privilege I never take lightly. As a head coach my players trust me with their development, and their families trust me with their safety. S 2213 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.

Blake Simpson

Pilgrim High School Head Football Coach