



JOAN BALLWEG

STATE SENATOR · 14TH SENATE DISTRICT

Assembly Bill 158: Harassment of Sports Officials
Assembly Committee on Judiciary
Testimony of Senator Joan Ballweg
April 15, 2021

Good morning, members of the committee. Thank you for hearing this important piece of legislation.

Wisconsin has a rich sports tradition, from our professional teams and college athletics to our high school sports and youth leagues that are officiated by our dedicated referees and sports officials who help keep games safe and fair. Unfortunately, this bill is needed because sports officials across the country and Wisconsin are facing an increasing amount of, and more serious types of, harassment from players and fans. According to the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO), which is based in Racine, nearly 48% of male officials and 45% of female officials have felt unsafe or feared for their safety in connection to officiating. This causes people to not want to become sports officials, and those who are involved are aging. The average age of officials across the county is 53, and the average starting age is now 40-45 years old, when 30 years ago, it was 20-25 years old.

This bill helps to address the abuse these officials are experiencing by creating a stronger penalty when someone harasses a sports official. Under the bill, the perpetrator could be guilty of a Class A misdemeanor, which carries a penalty up to nine months in jail and a fine up to \$10,000 or both. Additionally, the court may require up to 40 hours of community service work or require the person to participate in counseling.

This type of enhanced protection for sports officials is not a new idea. About 25 states have a law or resolution regarding the assault or harassment of an official and several other states are considering legislation (please see the attached list of states attached to this testimony). Many report some of the worst harassment is occurring at the youth sports level, which is a concern, not only for the example that it sets for our kids, but it also impacts the ability to recruit and retain those who are willing to officiate. Becoming a sports official is a fantastic opportunity for our youth to learn responsibility, leadership, and even earn an income. For example, in Wisconsin you can start training to be a soccer referee at 13 years old. Regardless of the age, no referee should be subjected to harassment and verbal abuse from players and fans. Please join us in support of this legislation and send a clear message that we appreciate and want to protect our sports officials.

This legislation was introduced at the end of last session as 2019 AB 735/SB 657, and we reintroduced it at the request of the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA), NASO, and the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC), and it has the support the Wisconsin Amateur Athletic Union, the Wisconsin Youth Soccer Association, and the Wisconsin Referee Development Program.

Thank you for your consideration of AB 158.

A "Yes" indicates legislation on the books. A bill number indicates proposed legislation.

STATE	ASSAULT AND/OR HARASSMENT
Alabama	Yes
Alaska	
Arizona	
Arkansas	Yes
California	Yes
Colorado	
Connecticut	<u>HB 5558, SB 526</u>
Delaware	Yes
Florida	Yes
Georgia	Yes
Hawaii	Yes
Idaho	Supportive Resolution
Illinois	Yes
Indiana	
Iowa	
Kansas	
Kentucky	Yes <u>HB 89</u>
Louisiana	Yes
Maine	
Maryland	
Massachusetts	
Michigan	<u>HB 4573</u>
Minnesota	Yes, civil stat.
Mississippi	
Missouri	Supportive Resolution
Montana	Yes
Nebraska	
Nevada	Yes
New Hampshire	
New Jersey	Yes
New Mexico	Yes
New York	<u>SB 5911</u>
North Carolina	Yes
North Dakota	
Ohio	<u>HB 44</u>
Oklahoma	Yes
Oregon	Yes, civil stat.
Pennsylvania	Yes
Rhode Island	
South Carolina	Yes
South Dakota	
Tennessee	
Texas	Yes <u>SB 619</u>
Utah	
Vermont	
Virginia	<u>HB 1791</u>
Washington	Supportive Resolution
West Virginia	Yes
Wisconsin	<u>AB 158, SB 175</u>
Wyoming	
Federal	

Data from the National Association of Sports Officials:
<https://www.naso.org/resources/legislation/legislation-status/>



ALEX A. DALLMAN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 41ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony in favor of Assembly Bill 158

Committee on Judiciary

April 15, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Tusler and committee members, for allowing me to testify before you today concerning Assembly Bill 158 which relates to harassment of a sports official and providing a penalty. I would also like to thank Representative Novak for his leadership in working with me on this important piece of legislation which will provide much needed assistance to our sports officials and youth sports programs.

Under current law, it is a Class B forfeiture if the person commits harassment. Under this bill, if this harassment is made against a sports official, such as a referee, umpire, judge, or person performing a similar function, and it is an attempt to intimidate or influence an action by a sports official, it becomes a Class A misdemeanor.

As a licensed sports official for over the past 10 years, I have been verbally and even physically confronted on a personal level while officiating sports. It has become an increasing issue across all levels of sports and harassment has directly led to the decline of people entering the sports official path and staying involved in it. I am so passionate about this issue because I believe that our youth sports provide a unique opportunity and environment for our youth to have fun, learn, and grow socially. As we speak, there are games and tournaments across the State that are being cancelled due to the lack of sports officials in the field. I believe this bill will take a large step toward deterring the verbal and physical abuse that sports officials are currently experiencing, and will allow our youth sport environments to be a much more welcoming and positive environment.

To the members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



TODD NOVAK

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 51ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 266-7502
Toll-Free: (888) 534-0051
Rep.Novak@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708-8953

DATE: April 15, 2021
RE: Testimony on Assembly Bill 158
TO: The Assembly Committee on Judiciary
FROM: State Representative Todd Novak

Thank you, Chairman Tusler, and members of the Committee on Judiciary for holding this public hearing on Assembly Bill 158 (AB158), which alters the penalty for harassing a sports official while acting in their official capacity.

People can be very passionate when it comes to sports. However, a good game can quickly go sour when individuals cross the line and harass sports officials. Verbally abusive and unruly fans are causing sports officials to quit at alarming rates. This issue is particularly pronounced for high school sports officials that may be newer to the industry.

I worked with the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletics Association (WIAA), the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO), and the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) to draft legislation to address this issue. The proposal before you also has the support of the Wisconsin Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), the Wisconsin Youth Soccer Association (WYSA), and the Wisconsin Soccer Referee Development Program.

Under current law, harassment is a Class B forfeiture. This proposal would change the penalty to be a Class A misdemeanor if the offense occurred against a sports official while acting in their official capacity. The bill also provides that a court may impose 40 hours of community service or mandate participation in anger management or abusive behavior intervention treatment. The provisions relating to community service and treatment will connect people with rehabilitative therapy to help prevent similar issues in the future.

Our sports officials should not be subjected to this kind of abusive treatment. The proposed change will deter people from engaging in this behavior and make attending sporting events enjoyable for sports officials, players, and spectators.

Thank you for your consideration of AB158.



WISCONSIN INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

April 15, 2021

Dear Assembly Committee on Judiciary,

Key in the words “Assault on Sport Officials” and in less than one second over 14 million results are at hand. Key in the words “Assault in Youth Sports” and over 19 million results are discovered in just over a half-second.

I am Dave Anderson the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association. I am joined today by WIAA Deputy Director Wade Labecki and WIAA Assistant Director, Kassie Mortimer.

We are here on behalf of the WIAA's 515 member senior high schools and the over 80,000 student athletes they serve. We are here on behalf of more than 7,600 men and women licensed with the WIAA to officiate high school sports in Wisconsin.

We are here to support AB158 and to thank the Authors, the Sponsors and you for giving this legislation your strongest consideration and we hope—your support.

Initially, 7,600 licensed officials may sound like a lot. That number is actually down over 1,600 officials from 2019—a 21% decrease. Further and unfortunately, many of those 1,600 officials were licensed and officiated in more than one sport, so the real impact of this loss is compounded by more than 3 times. In its net-negative impact, over 4,900 various sport license holders are no longer available to our membership.

We have no doubt that Covid has contributed to this decline. But we also know age, fear and frustration among sport officials were manifest before Covid. We know from the nationwide survey conducted by NASO in 2017 that here in Wisconsin and nationally the average age of sport officials is fast approaching the mid-50s. We know that the average starting age for a sport official is now 40-45 years old. Thirty years ago, the average starting age was 20-25 years old. Data also shows that most new officials will quit within the first 1-3 years.

With nearly 50% of 17,000 survey responders indicating they have felt unsafe or feared for their safety and 57% indicating that sportsmanship is getting worse, the difficulty in retaining new officials should not be surprising.

The environment in and around youth sports has gotten worse. This bill will be used as a tool and a reminder that abusive behavior toward sport officials has consequences.

Because of the environment, it is getting harder to recruit and retain sport officials. This bill isn't going to change society, but it shows officials that the legislature has their back and values the service they provide to schools, communities and youth sports. This bill is not about the occasional displeasure of a spirited fan or about fans being hard on a ref or ump. Our officials have thick skin. But they shouldn't be chased back to their cars following a game. They shouldn't have to feel unsafe or deal with the threat of violence while doing their job.

In a given year there are nearly 120,000 high school varsity contests across the WAA membership with again as many when freshman and junior varsity games are taken into account. Increasingly we hear from our members that they've had to cancel or reschedule contests because they could not find officials. When community youth sports and adult recreation is added in, the shortage is further exacerbated.

When it comes to the advancing age of our pool of sport officials and the realities behind why they put down their whistles, it becomes starkly true and painfully real that we cannot provide these opportunities for kids, schools and communities without the help of the women and men who officiate these contests for us and do their utmost to keep kids safe. For the WAA membership and for all who value youth and school sports, these are our frontline and essential workers.

Part of the bargain for their protecting our kids ought to be our valuing, encouraging and protecting them in return, with the help that AB158 would provide.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dave".

David J. Anderson
Executive Director

Date: 2021-02-06T17:59:55.960000Z

Name: ██████████ 150

Email: ██████████

Sport: Boys Hockey - Varsity

School: ██████████

Report:

██████████ Our crew of officials ██████████ arrived at ██████████ Ice Arena an hour and fifteen minutes prior to our regional final hockey game. We made our way to the officials room. About 10 minutes later, a lady came into our room and said "My name is ██████████ and I am the event supervisor and just so you know, I have been drinking since 10am and I am f██████████ed up". She proceeded to tell us that she was on a "ladies weekend" and had been skiing and drinking all day long. However, she came back for the game because her son plays on the ██████████ team.

The three of us were shell shocked with what we heard. We tried to end the conversation with ██████████ however, she became hostile and began complaining that there were officials from ██████████ on their game. She said it was "f██████████ed up" that they had to pay mileage to us when there were officials close by. To say that it was rude, inappropriate, and awkward would be an understatement. I explained to her that the WIAA schedules the officials and the Athletic Director from here school could touch base with the WIAA if they had an issue with the officials.

At the end of the game, the three of us came back to the officials room. The majority of the time we sign the game scoresheet in the officials room away from the crowd, players, and coaches. We do this so we can spend the appropriate amount of time reviewing the scoresheet to make sure that it was filled out correctly. When ██████████ came into our officials room she was upset. She said "you guys are just unbelievable.....What are you too good to sign the scoresheet on the ice". She kept going on and on about "you ██████████ guys thing you are just so good". I politely asked her to step out of our officials room and we would hand her the scoresheet when we were done looking at it and signing it. ██████████ responded back "No, I am not leaving the room and I am going to make sure you don't get paid". At this point, ██████████ went out of our officials room and asked if there was anyone else representing ██████████ that could remove ██████████ from our room. When her friend (who was the scorekeeper for the game) came in to ask ██████████ to leave, ██████████ told her "No....F██████████ that.....I am not leaving". After several minutes, it took three ██████████ people to remove her from the officials room.

Outside the officials room, ██████████ was yelling, cursing, and causing a big scene. The ██████████ parents were yelling and swearing back at ██████████ to leave the building. This went on for close to five minutes. It was quite an embarrassment.

I have been a WIAA Ice Hockey Official since the 1997-1998 season. Never have I seen a WIAA game manager drunk before. Never have I been treated so inappropriately by a host school. We were treated with hostility prior to the game and it continued well after the completion of the game. I am sure this is

Date: 2020-03-09T12:04:52.9030000Z

Name: Ken [REDACTED] 970

Email: [REDACTED]@yahoo.com

Sport: Boys Basketball - Varsity

School: [REDACTED]

Report:

[REDACTED] Following the conclusion of Saturday's regional final game between [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], I turned to exit the playing area at the direction of the [REDACTED] security staff. As I neared the exit, I was struck on the right side of my head by a full water bottle.

The bottle, according to the security staff, came from the balcony above the court. After gathering myself, security staff led me and my crew members to the safety of the officials' room.

Several members of the security staff and [REDACTED] athletics director [REDACTED] came into the locker room to check on me. I assured them that I did not need medical attention.

Before leaving the officials room, two

[REDACTED] Police Department officers took my personal information and asked if I wanted to press charges. I indicated that I did. The officers indicated they would contact me when they had further information.

Our entire crew was then safely escorted to our vehicle by two [REDACTED] security staff members and left the school premises without further incident.

On Sunday, I received an email communication from [REDACTED] Director of Athletics [REDACTED]. She wanted to confirm that I was the official who was struck and to provide information that [REDACTED] and the two police officers were undertaking to identify the person who threw the bottle that struck me. She also apologized for the individual's behavior and outlined steps the school district would take to prevent the individual from attending any [REDACTED] event in the future. She also asked if I intended to pursue charges against the person.

I indicated that I did wish to pursue charges and thanked [REDACTED] for her concern and thanked her security staff and the officers for their professional response.

Today I have bruising on my right forehead and general soreness in the area where the bottle struck me. I have a previously scheduled annual physical examination scheduled for Monday, March 9. I will have my doctor examine the area at that time.

I have asked to be informed by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] if any further information is identified. I have confidence that I will learn more from them

In the coming days.

Details:

Both teams were undefeated coming in. It was a very competitive match. [REDACTED] won in 5 sets. The 5th set was 15 - 13. After the match the game management from [REDACTED] came up to us and said that they wanted to escort us to our car. We didn't feel that we needed that, but they insisted. My back was to most of the parents, so I didn't see what was going on in the stands. But in the car, as I thought about it, I was taken back. Why did they feel the need to escort us to the car? What was happening in the stands that I wasn't aware of? I wasn't going to report this, but then I talked with [REDACTED] about it on Saturday and she said that I should. I apologize for this being late. I want to note that coaches from both teams were excellent.

Sir,

I had an issue that happened during this game that has been occurring more and more and I feel that this needs to be addressed. Please understand that I haven't felt the need to write such an email in 18 years of officiating high school football at the varsity level and I hope I never have to do it again.

I am the head linesman on our crew and I had [REDACTED] on my sideline. As the first half went along I began having a problem

with keeping players back in their box and I asked the coaches for help. They obliged rather gruffly to me but this went on for the entire first half. Also, there were 12 coaches/stats people/I'm not sure what their capacity was in the coaches box after the ready was blown on every single play. I explained to them that you must retreat to your coaches box after the ready with no more than 3 coaches allowed in the restricted area. This was met with "hey we told you that we do this and you had no problem with that" which was wrong. Now, I don't like to turn the game into a confrontation by throwing flags for coaches in the box or on the field so I rely on the coaching staff to police themselves but this got WAY out of hand.

Late in the second quarter, the coaching staff was complaining non-stop about fouls on the other side of the field. I explained that I officiate this side of the field but I would discuss this with our Referee as time permitted. That's when one of the assistant coaches broke out the phrase "you guys are the shittiest crew we have ever seen". Now that got me mad but I let it go. In fact there were a number of expletives that night by the coaching staff that I let go.

The lack of sportsmanship shown by the [REDACTED] staff surprised me and at times intimidated me by the sheer number of coaches they had on their sideline and the confrontational attitude they had during the entire game. Now I am a former military veteran and I can take yelling but this was borderline aggressive. There is NO place for that in our game.

I believe someone should discipline these coaches and explain the Coaches Ethics portion of the rule book. Furthermore, somebody should remind these coaches that the field is an extension of the classroom and we ALL are supposed to treat each other with respect and honor. NONE of those coaches displayed any of that. I call each coach AND player sir. What they referred to us as was contemptable. Maybe I should stop officiating if this is how the game is going to go.

Thank You for your time.

Details:

Throughout the entire game, [REDACTED] players, coaches and fans used abusive and profane language directed towards the officials. Even after several conversations with coaches to try and stop this behavior, it continued and resulted in multiple players being removed from the game. Scorekeeper confronted officials after the game and demanded to know names of specific officials.

> Fan
>
>School1:
[REDACTED]
>
>Person2:
>
>
>Type2:
>
>
>School2:
>
>
>Person3:
>
>
>Type3:
>
>
>School3:
>
>
>Person4:
>
>
>Type4:
>
>
>School4:
>
>
>Details:
> After [REDACTED] vs. [REDACTED] varsity baseball game last night,
>(May 1), my partner [REDACTED] and I were confronted as we were
>>walking back to our cars after the game. We were confronted by a father.
>(I know this as I've had issues with this gentleman during little league,
>junior high and JV baseball and basketball games before.) The Gentleman
>started off by walking over to us and asking "if I had a hot date
>tonight." I asked him what he meant. He said "I was the worst f*****
>>umpire he's ever seen. A strike is a strike and I don't know anything
>about a f***** strike zone. I'm the worst at everything I officiate. I
>don't have a f***** clue what I'm doing.." I responded..this is why we
>don't have officials. People like you that do this, let alone do this
>after a game is over. If you don't like how I call games, please get your
>license to officiate. He then carried on about how awful I am, and that
>he too has umpired and does a better job on his worst days. (there were
>many swear words said by him during this as well) As we are almost to our
>car, trying to walk away he wanted us to come across the street and talk
>to his f***** face. Everyone walked away.
>
>
>

School2:

Person3:

Type3:

School3:

Person4:

Type4:

School4:

Details:

On **[REDACTED]** 1, **[REDACTED]**, **[REDACTED]** High School varsity baseball player **[REDACTED]** #5, was ejected from a varsity baseball contest with **[REDACTED]** **[REDACTED]** High School due to his unsportsmanlike conduct and disrespect toward an official. The game was held at the **[REDACTED]** High School facility. I was acting in the capacity of Umpire-in-Chief and my field umpiring partner was **[REDACTED]**, who witnessed the following violations and subsequent ejection.

During the pre-game conference, **[REDACTED]** Head Coach **[REDACTED]** agreed that good sportsmanship would be the "order of the day." Unfortunately, from the very first inning and throughout the entire contest, **[REDACTED]** numerous **[REDACTED]** ballplayers and numerous **[REDACTED]** parents/spectators did not hold themselves up as models of good sportsmanship, respect and proper behavior. This aberrant behavior continued after the game when four **[REDACTED]** parents followed me across a field to my personal vehicle to provoke a confrontation.

Date: 2019-10-02T19:04:14.8170000Z

Name: ~~John Mathews~~ 950916

Email: ~~johnmathews~~@gmail.com

Sport: Girls Volleyball - Varsity

School: ~~Almond-Beverly~~

Report:

~~John~~ officiated a high school volleyball match last night (10/1/19) that ended with an unfortunate incident. ~~John~~ was hosting ~~Almond-Beverly~~ I was R1 for the match and my regular partner, Bonnie ~~John~~ was R2. We had competent, adult line judges, and a veteran scoring table. I can provide names of those individuals if you'd like. Here is a summary of what happened.

~~Almond-Beverly~~ won the first two games, each by narrow margins. ~~Almond-Beverly~~ was up in the third game 22-17, I believe, when things changed. ~~John~~ came back to beat ~~Almond-Beverly~~ and win game three 27-25. ~~Almond-Beverly~~ went on to fall apart and lose games four and five in decisive fashion. As the match turned against ~~Almond-Beverly~~, their coach (~~John~~) became increasingly animated and agitated. He began to react and complain each time a call did not go the way he wanted.

At the conclusion of the match Bonnie & I went to the scoring table to take care of the end of match duties and gather our belongings. That is when all you know what broke loose. The ~~John~~ coach came to the scorer's table and confronted me and began yelling about the calls we made during the match insinuating it was due to a personal conflict that occurred between him and I several years ago. I would NEVER let something like that affect the way I call a match. I have worked his matches at least 2 times since that time without incident. The student-athletes deserve the best effort officials can give. I tried to assure him I harbored no grudge against him and simply called the match the way I saw it, which is what I did. That did nothing to calm him down. He became more upset, yelling over and over "do your job, do your job, do you enjoy doing this to me?" I finally said "Stop ~~John~~. I've heard enough." He continued to rant, shouting, among other things, "you haven't even heard me start with you yet". I then said "~~John~~, you are asking to get written up" He said "go ahead write me up and then I'll write you up. This isn't finished yet and you haven't heard the last of me." I finished packing my stuff and Bonnie and I turned to start walking out of the gym, at which point the ~~John~~ JV coach came over to apologize to me on their behalf for ~~John~~ conduct. As Bonnie and I continued to walk away from the confrontation, ~~John~~ hollered "Sure, just walk away F**k you ~~John~~. This isn't over." As we continued to walk out of the gym, I realized he was following us. As we walked by the ~~John~~ bench, one of his players apologized to us for his conduct. Almost simultaneously, a middle age man in front of us (who later identified himself to me as an ~~John~~ Board member) tried to get ~~John~~ to stop following us by repeating several times "Stop ~~John~~. This isn't the time or place." It was at this point that the onsite ~~John~~ administrators (AD ~~John~~ and ~~John~~) and the ~~John~~ board member prevented ~~John~~ from following us into the lobby. We stopped at the concession stand so I could get my truck keys out of my gym bag, which is when the ~~John~~ board member ID'd himself as such, apologized for ~~John~~ conduct, and said "he'd take care of it." ~~John~~ AD ~~John~~ then accompanied us to

the door, asked if we were OK, and if we wanted an escort out. I said we were fine. We proceeded to my truck without further incident.

If this incident would have occurred during the match or before I signed the scorebook indicating that the match had officially ended, the result would have been a coach ejection.

I have officiated volleyball for 25 years and have never had any situation rise to the level that this one did.

Date: 2020-01-29T13:47:00.3330000Z

Name: ██████████600

Email: ██████████@aim.com

Sport: Boys Ice Hockey - Varsity

School: ██████████ High School

Report:

██████████ Following a 4-3 OT loss to ██████████, ██████████ a minor official/official score keeper entered the officials room seeking signatures from the officials on the score sheet. Upon entering the officials room, ██████████ began to berate us as officials, stating that we "missed three blatant penalties on ██████████" and commented on how he disapproved of the officiating that night. He also stated that if his son were to have been hurt and needed to go to the hospital, that it would've been a "bad night for us." I reminded ██████████ that he was a minor official and that it would be in his best interest to stop talking/berating us. I stated that as a minor official he is to remain impartial. I understand that it was a heated/contested game and emotions can run high, however, the actions of ██████████ as a minor official were completely unacceptable. I realize ██████████ is likely a volunteer and has a son on the team, however, if he agrees to become a minor official during the game, he no longer can play the role of fan/parent and needs to act more professionally and be impartial.

Date: 2020-03-08T14:50:15.613000Z

Name: [REDACTED] 26447

Email: [REDACTED]@yahoo.com

Sport: Boys Basketball - Varsity

School: [REDACTED]

Report:

[REDACTED] As we were leaving the court at the end of the game, [REDACTED] player #24, [REDACTED] [REDACTED], ran after official [REDACTED] in a hostile manner. He was restrained by me ([REDACTED]), [REDACTED] (a retired basketball official), other adults/fans and a female [REDACTED] staff member who was our host. We were able to leave the court without injury. [REDACTED] continued on with this behavior and had to be further restrained by several of [REDACTED] coaches. Please see the video for more details.

Testimony of Barry Mano

President of the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO)

April 15, 2021

Prepared for the Wisconsin State Assembly – Judiciary Committee

In consideration of AB #158: An Act Concerning Assault of a Sports Official

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this important issue regarding the safety of sports officials throughout Wisconsin. My name is Barry Mano – founder and president of the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO), and founder of *Referee* magazine. Both organizations are headquartered in Racine. NASO is a non-profit educational association representing more than 25,000 members across the United States, including Wisconsin.

NASO joins with the WIAA, WAAU, WYSA, WIAC and the Wisconsin Soccer Referee Development Program in support this legislative effort.

Why Assault Legislation?

The media so very often reminds us that civil behavior at sporting events is on the decline. Verbal attacks against sports officials now have a sinister companion – physical assaults. More such assaults are happening; more are being reported.

The National Association of Sports Officials has championed assault legislation for more than three decades. Currently 22 states have adopted various forms of such legislation, with one goal in mind: protect sports officials. (For the complete list visit www.naso.org.)

These legislative efforts occasionally face objections; objections rarely based on an opinion that sports officials do not face difficult challenges. Rather, the objections tend to be based on a statutory argument: There are already assault laws on the books, so why is it necessary to have more laws? Why create a “special class?” It’s a fair debate.

The advantages and benefits of having specific statutory law dealing with attacks on officials are tangible: penalties are increased; second offenses can be more severely dealt with; felony convictions may be available. The existence of a state law criminalizing an attack on an official, telegraphs to prosecutors, judges and juries that such an assault is to be taken seriously – that it is not OK to punch a referee if you don’t like a call that he or she makes.

Increased penalties are also a deterrent. When the general sporting public – coaches, players, and fans alike – are aware that assaulting a sports official means severe penalties, that very notion should prevent some assaults from occurring.

Certain segments of the public deserve and need special protection due to the nature of their jobs – police officers, public-transit drivers, firefighters, teachers, etc. NASO believes that in the sports world, officials are that segment that deserve and need special protection due to their

importance to the game. Why do sports officials need extra protection? It's simple. Officials represent the only authority on the field or court and are therefore in a position – by the nature of their job – to be the object of praise and ridicule. If officials are unable to control the situation, it is likely that chaos will occur.

A.B. #158 takes a significant and proper step to increase protection for sports officials in Connecticut. We encourage members to support this legislation, which makes an assault against a sports official a **class A misdemeanor**. In addition to any other penalties that apply, the court may impose up to 40 hours of community work and may require the actor to participate in counseling – at the actor's expense.

Sportsmanship

Sportsmanship applies to the personal safety of sports officials but is also a major issue impacting the recruitment and retention of officials. A significant majority of sports officials do this job as an avocation. Most officials love the sport and officiate to give something back to the game. They make huge sacrifices of time to train and travel to meetings and games. Unsafe working conditions causes many officials to quit.

A few short years ago, NASO undertook the largest survey of sports officials in history. Over 17,000 officials responded to our questionnaire, sharing their views on key topics. The issue of sportsmanship was one of special significance. Here are some sobering statistics from that survey for your consideration. They bear forcefully upon the topic in front of us today:

- 64 percent of officials have removed a spectator from the court or field for poor behavior.
- 57 percent of officials have had to step in to break up a fight or skirmish during a game.
- Six percent of sports officials have been assaulted during or after a game by a fan. Almost five percent have been assaulted by a player and 2.5 percent by a coach. That's unacceptable.
- 53 percent of officials have felt unsafe or feared for their safety due to the behavior of an administrator, player, coach or spectator.

The full NASO survey results are available at www.naso.org/survey/.

To conclude

Steps must be taken to improve safety for sports officials, and the major source of the problem, which is bad fan behavior. Legislation establishing a special protected status for sports officials is an important and significant step towards improving working conditions for officials and keeping the pipeline open for new officials to enter this field.

NASO wholeheartedly supports **A.B. #158**, and we encourage passage of this legislation. The legislation not only supports the role sports officials play on our society today in a positive fashion, but also establishes an example for other states to emulate.



W I S C O N S I N I N T E R C O L L E G I A T E A T H L E T I C C O N F E R E N C E

780 REGENT STREET • MADISON, WI 53715 • PHONE: (608) 263-4402 • FAX: (608) 265-3176 • wiacsports.com

April 15, 2021

Dear Assembly Committee on Judiciary,

The Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) and its member institutions have employed thousands of game officials throughout our 108 years of existence, therefore, our conference is supportive of AB 158.

Given the proximity of our member institutions, the majority of officials are from the state of Wisconsin and the WIAC is dependent upon the pipeline that begins at the youth, middle school and high school levels for its officials.

As a member of the NCAA Division III, WIAC student-athletes are not permitted to receive athletic scholarships, which means our student-athletes participate for the love of their sport. The same can be said for Division III game officials. For example, a WIAC football official earns approximately \$180 for a contest, which does not include mileage nor per diem. This official's commitment could require 10 hours on a game day, in addition to the hours of training and preparation it takes to officiate at our level.

Nationally, there is a shortage of game officials and an increase in demand for officials, especially at the youth level. However, while recruiting potential officials, one common concern most athletic administrators have to address is the negative impression of officiating and the abuse that occurs albeit from participants, fans and parents. For instance, a recent survey by the National Association of Sports Officials reported more than 75 percent of all high school officials quit due to adult behavior and, what's more, 80 percent of new officials step away after only two years of officiating.

Ultimately, game officials are a necessary function of athletic contests and integral to the conduct, fairness and integrity of games. Officials deserve to be protected to the fullest extent of the law as a "protected class" of individuals.

Sincerely,

Danielle Harris
WIAC Commissioner



To: Members, Assembly Committee on Judiciary
From: Matt Amundson, Wisconsin Parks and Recreation Association
Date: April 15, 2021
RE: Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 158

Chairman Tusler, members of the committee, my name is Matt Amundson, Director of Middleton Park and Recreation and member of the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association (WPRPA). WPRPA is a membership association that represents over 1,200 individuals delivering a broad spectrum of services in Wisconsin. Our members include Park, Recreation and Therapeutic Recreation professionals in local, county, state, school district, private and agency settings. WPRPA also represents public Park and Recreation Boards and Commissions, students, commercial firms, and Emeritus (retired) members.

I am here today to testify in support AB 158, which would help protect youth sports and amateur athletics by increasing the penalty for harassing sports officials. WPRPA members, across the state, organize, host, and otherwise facilitate many kinds of athletic activities. We believe that organized sports benefit our communities, and we are concerned about the persistent shortage of qualified officials that many communities have faced.

A 2019 article published by the National Recreation and Park Association noted that communities across the country have reported shortages of sports officials for at least a decade. Because the organizations that provide officials for games tend to prioritize competitive and high school events, park districts and recreation departments are among those most affected by the shortage.¹

The same article noted that several studies have found a strong correlation between shortages of officials and how officials are treated on the job. Youth sports officials frequently experience verbal and sometimes physical abuse at the hands of overzealous parents and coaches. Yet many officials themselves are simply teenagers or young adults who dedicate their spare time to helping others enjoy the sport that they love.

Our communities and children can benefit so much from organized sports, whether at local parks and recreation facilities or in schools. It is a shame that some children may miss out on the opportunities and benefits of organized sports due to a lack of qualified officials. On behalf of WPRPA, I encourage you to support this simple, commonsense protection.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions.

¹ <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2019/july/encouraging-positive-proper-treatment-of-game-officials/>

Schmidt, Melissa

From: Rep.Tusler
Sent: Thursday, April 15, 2021 8:40 AM
To: Penterman, William; Rep.Cabrera; Rep.Hebl; Rep.Horlacher; Rep.Kerkman; Rep.Ortiz-Velez; Rep.Ramthun; Rep.Sortwell; Rep.Thiesfeldt; Rep.Tusler; Schmidt, Melissa
Subject: FW: AB -158

From: Jeremy Schlitz <jschlitz@madison.k12.wi.us>
Sent: Thursday, April 15, 2021 8:00 AM
To: Rep.Tusler <Ron.Tusler@legis.wisconsin.gov>; Rep.Kerkman <Rep.Kerkman@legis.wisconsin.gov>
Subject: AB -158

Dear Assembly Committee on Judiciary Chairperson Tusler and Vice-Chair Kerkman,

Thank you for your work and upcoming hearing on a number of proposed items. Unfortunately it looks as though my schedule now may not allow me to attend the in-person hearing and provide testimony on behalf of the Wisconsin Athletic Directors Association (WADA) related to AB-158 Relating to: harassment of a sports official and providing a penalty. If I am able to attend I will make similar remarks but if possible would like these considered.

Below are my intended remarks and I appreciate the discussion and consideration to support and protect sports officials:

High school athletic directors have consistently seen the number of officials available to run contests decline while participation numbers and contests increase for education based athletics. Sports officials are integral parts of the safety and management of education based athletics and providing these opportunities for our student athletes. We believe the bill proposed by Representative Novak is another tool athletic directors can use to support officials and dissuade passionate spectators who may feel the urge to intimidate or threaten sports officials. As an organization and profession we are committed to the legal responsibility of supervising the activity closely and providing a safe physical environment. This extends to the management of spectators and protection of our sports officials. We have seen an increase in behaviors directed at sports officials and this tool will be a helpful deterrent and educational tool for us to create the needed environments for athletes and the community. This also provides a commitment to potential and current officials to recruit and retain them to keep providing opportunities for competitions. Sport officials at our level do it for the love of the game and to give back to the sport and community and deserve this added layer of protection and support.

Respectfully,

Jeremy Schlitz, CAA
MMSD District Athletic Director
Madison Memorial HS Director of Athletics and Operations
WADA Past President (2019)
(608)663-6079

Schmidt, Melissa

From: Rep.Tusler
Sent: Thursday, April 15, 2021 10:25 AM
To: Penterman, William; Rep.Cabrera; Rep.Hebl; Rep.Horlacher; Rep.Kerkman; Rep.Ortiz-Velez; Rep.Ramthun; Rep.Sortwell; Rep.Thiesfeldt; Rep.Tusler; Schmidt, Melissa
Subject: FW: Support of HB158 (Game Officials)

From: Bursch, Nolan <Nolan.Bursch@legis.wisconsin.gov>
Sent: Thursday, April 15, 2021 10:09 AM
To: Rep.Tusler <Ron.Tusler@legis.wisconsin.gov>
Subject: FW: Support of HB158 (Game Officials)

Hello,

We received the email below. I just wanted to pass this along for distribution to the committee.

Thanks,

Nolan

Nolan Bursch
Research Assistant
Office of Rep. Todd Novak
PH: (608) 266-7502

From: slapshot@wwt.net
Date: April 14, 2021 at 5:30:25 PM CDT
To: Sen.Ballweg@legis.wisconsin.gov
Cc: Keith Noll - AAU Hockey & Zone C Rep <slapshot@wwt.net>, Cheryl Mohr <cherylmohr@higherlevelcamps.com>, LeaAnn Johnson - Wi Gymn <aauwigymnastics@gmail.com>, Mark W Noll - Wisconsin AAU Boys Basketball <markwnoll@gmail.com>, "Natalie Ginter - WiAAU Ex. Committee" <natalieginter@yahoo.com>, Jenny Hahn - Wisconsin AAU Volleyball <jennylhahn@gmail.com>, Norm Miller - AAU Judo Chair <judoinc@att.net>, Kara Noll - AAU Team Wisconsin <wivikingclub@gmail.com>, Keith Noll AAU Football <keithn@aausports.org>
Subject: Support of HB158 (Game Officials)

Senator Ballweg
Representative Novak

I have served as the Wisconsin AAU Sports President/Governor since 1994 and previously was an officer from 1988 through 1993.

The AAU National Organization represents 700,000 student-athletes with 85,000+ coaches and 20,000+ game officials in 45 sports. The Wisconsin AAU has over 10,000 student-athletes in 26 sports with an estimated 1000+ game officials.

On behalf of HB158, the state AAU officers not only support this legislation 100% but applaud the state representatives who have brought this needed legislation to the forefront.

I'm sorry that I am out of town in meetings or I would have attended your hearing in support of HB158.
< br>

If appropriate please add the Wisconsin AAU statement to the record in support of HB158.

Thank you

Keith Noll
Wisconsin AAU Governor
AAU Zone C Representative(BOD)
AAU National Hockey Chair
AAU National Football Chair
AAU Insurance Co-Chair
AAU Nominations & Elections Chair
AAU National Redistricting Chair
AAU Law & Legislation Committee
[715-829-2346](tel:715-829-2346)

Sent from my T-Mobile 4G LTE device