



Connecticut Junior Soccer Association

11 Executive Drive • Farmington, Connecticut 06032
Telephone (860) 676-1161 • Fax (860) 676-1162 • www.cjsa.org

Committee on Children

Raised Bill 6722 An Act Concerning Concussions in Youth Athletics
Testimony of Margaret Girard on behalf of the Connecticut Junior Soccer Association
February 17, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Raised Bill No. 6722. I am Margaret Girard, President of the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Junior Soccer Association, generally referred to as CJSA. With me is Mr. Thom Meredith, CJSA's Executive Director.

Section 2 of RB 6722, will require organizations providing sport opportunities to Connecticut children to provide a written statement containing certain information regarding concussions upon registration but no later than January 1, 2016 to players engaging in the activities sponsored by the organization as well as their parents.

Background:

CJSA and its member clubs will be directly impacted by this legislation. CJSA is a nonprofit organization committed to serving and educating our members through the development, promotion and administration of youth soccer in the state of Connecticut. CJSA has served our member clubs and Connecticut youth soccer players for over 40 years. We currently have approximately 70,000 registered youth players age 4-19 who are served by over 170 CJSA member clubs in 7 Districts. These players participate in a broad range of organized soccer activities which range from weekend recreation programs to elite leagues and the Olympic Development Program for the advanced competitive player.

These activities are made possible by thousands of dedicated administrators and coaches who are involved at the state, district and local club levels. The vast majority of these individuals are volunteers, including the CJSA Board of Directors. Without the energy, enthusiasm and countless hours put in weekly by these individuals, CJSA simply could not operate. Certainly the availability of soccer related activities for Connecticut youth would be greatly curtailed.

CJSA Concerns:

CJSA is committed to promoting the safety of our players as they practice and compete at all levels; concussion avoidance and appropriate treatment is a key concern. We applaud the Committee for establishing a Task Force to study this issue and proposing legislative action. We had the opportunity meet with and share our initiatives and challenges with the Task Force and are appreciative that our input has been considered. We have reviewed the proposed bill and concur that parent and athlete awareness is important and that organizations such as CJSA have an important role in disseminating information. We do have some concerns and questions regarding the bill. We appreciate the opportunity to testify today and are hopeful of the opportunity to work with the Committee to address our concerns.



Timing:

RB 6722, which will become effective July 1, 2015, if enacted, would require CJSA and its member clubs to provide the specified statement upon registration but no later than January 1, 2016. This timing is out of synch with the soccer calendar, which runs from September through August, and will present significant challenges. Many clubs conduct registration for the teams that will play in the 2015-2016 soccer year in May and June, which will be before the effective date of the bill and perhaps even before passage. Permitting this information to be provided with the first registration after January 1, 2016 would address this issue.

Methodology:

RB 6722 specifies that a written statement be provided to each athlete ages 7 -19 and their parent or legal guardian. CJSA clubs serve very diverse communities and differ in the resources available for registration. For example, many clubs conduct registration exclusively on line and would plan on providing the information through their website. Others rely on paper documents handed out and collected through schools and community organizations and would consider providing the material along with the registration form. CJSA may have a separate requirement under the bill to provide the information but is not involved at the time of registration. Flexibility is needed as this requirement is implemented and organizations need to know that good faith efforts to disseminate the information will be recognized. With this in mind, we recommend that operators of a youth sport activity be required to make the information available to registered athletes and their parents and that online, electronic and paper are acceptable methods.

RB 6722 identifies certain topics to be address in the required statement but leaves it up to the youth sports organizations to determine the actual content. Leaving it up to each affected organization to develop its own statement places a significant burden on those organizations and is likely to result in contradictory information and confusion for parents and athletes. It would be helpful if the statement to be provided was developed and updated by a specified source such as the Department of Public Health.

Ongoing Review and Considerations:

With or without this legislation, CJSA will continue to pursue player safety. It is a key component of CJSA's mission and a key consideration of parents when choosing activities for their children. We are continuing to monitor the data and discussion on concussion prevention and treatment so that we can make this information and best practices available to our members and adopt further measures to protect players.

As we consider measures to implement the legislation and imposing requirements on our members, we are acutely aware that the availability of programs for our players is dependent on volunteers. They are dedicated and provide countless hours of service because they want quality soccer programs for their kids and their communities, but they have concerns and limits. The time commitment and liability exposure are major considerations. We must evaluate the actions we take to enhance safety with the impact on our volunteers and their concerns in mind.

We look forward to working with the Committee and others to address concerns with the practical implementation of the requirements imposed by RB 6722.