

**Testimony: HB 2520**

**February 19, 2020**

**By: Jeffrey Bachman**

**Members of the Committee:**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of House Bill 2520. My name is Jeffrey Bachman and I am from Salina, Kansas. I have been active officiating for the last 30 years in various sports, including football, basketball, wrestling, softball, volleyball, and baseball. This has not only included high school sports, but various youth leagues with kids ranging in age from 5 to 18.

I'm speaking on behalf of myself and as a member of the KSHAA, the Kansas State High School Athletic Association. Our organization represents around 5,000 active officials yearly and many are active in more than one sport. The mission of the KSHAA is to serve students by providing leadership for the administration of education based interscholastic activities. Our fundamental principle is promotion of a well-balanced activity program and development of effective citizenship through the practice of good sportsmanship.

Currently, the KSHAA is working diligently to overcome the growing shortage of youth sports officiators throughout the state. The primary reason for the growing shortage of officials is abuse from fans, particularly parents who lose perspective over the stakes of school sponsored or youth league games. A study conducted by the National Association of Sports Officials in March of 2019, showed 53% of youth sports officiators have felt unsafe or threatened by spectators and coaches while working a game. Statistics from the National Association of Sports Officials study show that 64% of officials were forced to eject a spectator due to bad behavior. This causes great turnover in younger officials and even keeps younger candidates from even applying. In fact, many younger officials do not last longer than three years due to the current environment of sportsmanship. The current average age of Kansas softball umpires is 60 years.

Sports officials should be able to perform their duty without threat of personal injury because of their game calls. Being a referee or an umpire is no easy task. State legislatures can show support for the men and women who officiate on the courts, fields, and ice by passing laws to protect them. The NASO has been bringing attention to assault issues for years. There are currently 21 states that have officiating assault laws including 19 with criminal laws and 2 with civil statutes.

Before closing, I want to share briefly about my experiences as a longtime official. I have been in the very uncomfortable situation where I have had to eject coaches many times, have ejected parents, and have even had to contact the police to control the situation and for safety concerns. I, unfortunately, have had to decline officiating at certain high schools because the athletic director would not protect the officials with crowd control nor against verbally abusive coaching styles. I love being an official. I don't work for the fans, the coaches, or the schools, but for the kid who enjoys the sport.

For all of the reasons mentioned in this testimony, I urge you to pass House Bill 2520. Thank you again for this opportunity to appear.

I'm happy to stand for any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Bachman