

Testimony

NYC Public Hearing on Tackle Football

Harry Harrington, Regional Director, Pop Warner Little Scholars

New York Assembly Committee on Health

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Good morning, Chairman Gottfried. My name is Harry Harrington, I am the volunteer Regional Director for the Eastern Region of Pop Warner, which includes New York, and I have lived here my whole life. Thank you for the opportunity to share my experiences as a longtime football coach, parent, volunteer and a constituent.

As someone who played Pop Warner and high school football, I am grateful for those experiences. They helped shape me. In fact, they had such a positive impact that I have spent the last thirty years involved in youth and high school athletics because I wanted to do what I could to make sports, including the great game of football, available to those who want to play.

I have coached high school football and rowing at the varsity level, and I have coached Pop Warner football. And if you have coached you know that nothing is more important than the young people you're charged with leading. As coaches we care about their skill development, certainly, and their role in supporting the team goal. But, far more importantly, we care about their physical and emotional well-being.

I don't think we have ever been more equipped to do that job in football than we are today with so much more information to work with when it comes to player health and safety.

You are considering banning football because you believe state government needs to be the ones looking out for our kids' well-being but I can promise you there are thousands of smart, informed and committed adults who are looking out for the young people of New York. They have more tools and more stringent rules about limiting the level of contact and adhering to strict concussion protocols. On top of that, coaching education has never been stronger. And we have the guidance of medical professionals who are studying these issues at a very high level and are making changes to keep kids safer.

What I have heard from parents when we discuss your consideration of a football ban is this: let the parents use their own voice to make this decision. It would be nearly impossible to find one who has not heard about concussions – and CTE – when talking about football. Parents are informed. And if a parent decides they don't want their child to play tackle then he or she can play flag football, which is offered in virtually every community, or play another sport. It is the parent's choice, and the child's choice, which direction to follow.

This sport offers so much. I have seen firsthand how a young person comes to the sport feeling left out or unsure of their own abilities and you see them develop confidence, become part of a team and grow as person.

Not to mention creating a love of being physically active. Football has the power to be positively transformative and with our modern approach to playing and coaching, it has never been in a better spot to do that.

I hope you do not take that opportunity away from those who want to play it.

Thank you for your time.