

**Testimony of Scott Hallenbeck,
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Joint Public Health Committee
On H2007
OPPOSE

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Good afternoon.

Chairwoman Comerford, Vice Chair Collins, Chairman Mahoney, Vice Chair Tyler and all members of this joint committee on public health: Thank you for having me today.

My name is Scott Hallenbeck. I am the Chief Executive Officer of USA Football, the sport's national governing body and a member of the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee.

USA Football supports youth tackle football. I support youth tackle football and today's game is safer than it's ever been. And we are here today to advocate on behalf of youth football.

At USA Football, our intense focus and emphasis on the safety of young athletes has positively changed the culture of youth football by establishing nationally endorsed standards for safer and smarter play.

More than 700,000 youth and high school coach certifications have been completed through our Heads Up Football program since 2012. Coach certification in youth football is the new normal. No coach should be on a field unless she or he is certified. Education is changing behavior for the better.

Our national practice guidelines for youth tackle football – to our knowledge – are the first of any sport to earn the endorsements of three of the country's largest sports medicine associations. Those groups are the American College of Sports Medicine, the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine and the National Athletic Trainers' Association. This also represents a significant change across youth football, where years ago, an adult with a whistle had no guidance when it came to limiting the number of practices per week or the number of minutes allotted to full contact or putting a heat acclimatization period in place for player safety.

USA Football was the first national governing body of any sport to participate with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to promote its "Heads Up" Concussion in Youth Sports program, joining other early supporters like the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Alliance for Youth Sports.

Just last week, I was honored to join United States Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois in voicing USA Football's endorsement of the "Protecting Student Athletes from Concussions Act."

USA Football also was the first U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee member to earn a National Athletic Trainers' Association Youth Sports Safety Ambassador Award for our work focused on the health of children nationwide. We share this honor with leaders like U.S. Congressman Bill Pascrell of New Jersey, Dr. Dawn Comstock of the University of Colorado and Pop Warner Little Scholars.

Our commitment to player safety is real. It is witnessed through a number of substantial reforms and partnerships benefitting young athletes in Massachusetts and across our nation.

USA Football strongly yet respectfully **opposes House Bill 2007**. Please let me explain why.

We understand and respect the concerns parents have about their children's health and well-being – in all sports. And we believe that responding to those concerns is critical to making football more inclusive and accessible.

Parents do not want their government telling them when their kids can play football. We hear this from them often. Instead, they want to make informed decisions for themselves. Parents need information and options in order to determine what is best for their child.

It is incumbent on USA Football and our youth football partners to educate parents on what to look for when considering youth football programs for their children.

To meet this need, we've created the Football Development Model – or "FDM." Aligned with the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee's long-term athlete development principles, the FDM is based on progressive skill instruction that is developmentally appropriate physically, mentally and socially. It is a holistic approach to child and athlete development.

The FDM is a forward-thinking framework for how we play, coach and experience football. Like baseball's progression of tee-ball to "coach pitch" to "player pitch," the model employs multiple football game types, such as flag, modified tackle, what we call Rookie Tackle and 11-player tackle, applying them as conduits to learn and reinforce developmentally appropriate skills. This creates new pathways for more kids to participate, have fun and enjoy a sport they love to play as a pathway for life-long wellness.

Guided by our FDM Council, comprised of leaders from highly respected institutions such as Children's National Hospital, Dartmouth College, the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee and others, the FDM marks our sport's first long-term athlete development model for all players, youth players in particular.

Our Council includes specialists across medicine, child development and long-term athlete development as well as football subject matter experts from youth, high school, college and professional football. This Council would be pleased to share findings and information with this Committee, including its recommendations for the grassroots football community. This may include but would not be limited to fundamental skill development, appropriate football entry points and options, and medically endorsed practice structure.

Beyond the headlines, the medical community has published literature with conclusions on both sides of the contact sport participation debate, although today's youth football is far different than it was years ago.

We continue to advance and reimagine the positive culture change in youth football.

I wish to underscore that USA Football and our FDM Council would be pleased to work with this Committee for the good of the Massachusetts youth and scholastic football family.

In conclusion, upon reviewing the full scope of this matter for families across Massachusetts, I ask this Committee to **OPPOSE H2007**.

Thank you.