

A ban of youth tackle football is a tremendous overreach into the rights of parents to allow their children to play a game. Tackle football at the youth level is safer than ever, our coaches and administrators have never been trained more thoroughly, the equipment has never been better, and the research being used to support a ban is incomplete and unfairly targets the youth level of tackle football.

Specifically, the “Heads-Up” tackling system initiated by USA Football in 2012 has led to a wave of changes from the high school level down. A youth player that started at age 7, with the advantage of all these changes would just now be a junior in HS.

The marketing campaigns generating headlines and raising public concerns about football’s overall safety are based on research with extreme selection bias, generally conducted only on a relatively small number of professional and college athletes. I urge the committee members to look past the marketing banter and find studies related to youth and HS players not the small 4-6% of players that advance to college.

You will not find many, but just yesterday the University of Colorado released findings of 11,000 youths followed for 14 years, which resulted in no increased risks of cognitive or mental health impairment from playing contact sports. The same study found those playing youth sports were less likely to suffer mental health issues by 30. I urge the medical community, the legislature, and public to invest time, effort, and dollars working with our volunteers to help us all continue improving the game.

Tackle football offers all kids, including those who are awkward, clumsy, unathletic, or overweight, a chance to participate and most importantly make a difference as a valued team member. Flag football and most other sports cater to a narrower range of kids who are typically adept at running, catching, and throwing. This committee has a unique knowledge of the childhood obesity rate and the need to get those at-risk youth active; tackle football is just that opportunity.

I urge the committee to work with us to defeat this bill and learn more about the safety advancements in training and equipment in your local communities.