

Favorable

JUST US SPORTS OFFICIALS (JUSO) SUPPORT THE PASSAGE OF MARYLAND STATE BILL 1034

My name is Dwayne Marcus, Sr., and I am co-owner of Just Us Sports Officials, LLC (JUSO).

My officiating board is approved by the DC State Athletic Association (DCSAA) and I am a voting member on the National Federation of High School Associations' (NFHS) Football Rule Committee.

I'm a member of the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference Football Officials Association (MEACFOA) and an active high school official, too. While serving in all of these roles, I have been the victim of a myriad of forms of disrespect, threats of bodily harm, been physically accosted at the conclusion of a sporting contest, and have had to work with other officials in providing crisis and ongoing mental health supports for having been the victim(s) of similar forms of abuse.

Speaking for myself and JUSO, as well as my peers in officiating and assigning within Maryland, I wholeheartedly support the passage of State Bill 1034.

One of the primary reasons I got involved in sports officiating was to remain an active participant in the games I loved so much while being raised in a single-parent household in Washington, D.C. The ability to foster and develop new relationships with fellow officials, coaches and players while earning some extra part-time income was great, too.

However, I am taken aback by the increased ire of anger, frustration, and verbal abuse that I and my fellow officials have been experiencing over the last half-dozen years from parents, fans,

coaches and players. Having ascended to the role of assignor and rules interpreter, I hear and see this abuse, and the heightened level of fear and safety concerns that come with it, as the primary reason more people do not get involved in sports officiating.

Sadly, data pertaining to recruitment and retention confirms what I hear and see. Since our company's inception in 2012, JUSO has experienced a significant decline in the number of officials who express interest, register or re-register to become sports officials. Our retention rates are even more concerning: just one in every seven officials we recruit and assign in Year One return to take assignments in Year Two.

That's a 14 percent retention rate — few businesses endure a 14-percent retention rate within their core talent field and survive. This number is stunting our organization's growth and significantly impacting our ability to gain new contracts and retaining existing agreements in the DMV area. Coupled with a higher-than-usual number/percentage of officials leaving the avocation of sports officiating altogether, and a national shortage of sports officials, the state of Maryland and the region known as the DMV, stretching from Baltimore to DC and into northern Virginia, is beginning to suffer situations where games are staffed by fewer officials than contracted for and, in worst-case scenarios, postponements and cancellations.

That this legislation be approved by Maryland's esteemed legislators and signed into law by the Honorable Gov. Larry Hogan is not simply desired, but vital, to our industry's survival. Speaking as a leader within the officiating industry, there are currently no penalties in place for individuals who physically assault a sports official in the state of Maryland. As someone who lives in and

operates an officiating business in our great state, I want to see Maryland be proactive instead of reactive when it comes to protecting sports officials.

According to the National Association of Sports Officials, the average age of a new sports official was between 20 and 25 years old in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Today, that number is between 40 and 43 years old, and the average age of a sports official is 52.

The future of the avocation is highly dependent upon our ability to replace and replenish the number of officials who leave the avocation due to retirement, lack of family and career supports (unable to take off from work and/or access childcare), and, most notably, fear of safety for one's well-being.

I am gravely concerned that we in the industry of sports officiating will not be able to sustain and withstand the inability to recruit, train and develop an appropriate amount of quality sports officials to replace the number of officials who are leaving the avocation in a timely and sufficient manner to remain in business.

In advocating for the passage of State Bill 1034, I'm advocating not only for a deterrent for some of the rather disturbing behavior I and my colleagues in the sports officiating industry have experienced, but some assurance to the new officials we recruit that the state of Maryland recognizes the role sports officials play in providing opportunities for youth to play sports in their communities and in their high schools, as well as adults in recreational leagues, too.

Many of our communities in Maryland thrive in part because of the outstanding recreational and competitive sports programming available through neighborhood and school-based leagues. That vitality starts to slip away when we don't have enough officials on-hand to meet the escalating

demands in the youth, scholastic, and even adult sports recreation leagues in the state of Maryland.

I am available to testify at any hearing in support of State Bill 1034. My contact information is below in my signature, and I look forward to speaking with and working with you in the near future.

V/r,

Dwayne Marcus, Sr.

Co-Owner, JustUs Sports Officials, L.L.C.

DCSAA NFHS Football Rules Interpreter

Voting Member of the NFHS Football Rules Committee

Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference Football Official

2473 Athens Place

Waldorf, MD 20603

202-903-6798

www.justusofficials.net