

**Testimony of Dr. Michael Lewis, MD, MPH, MBA, FACPM, FACN  
Colonel, U.S. Army (Retired)  
President and Founder  
Brain Health Education and Research Institute  
mlewis@brainhealtheducation.org  
7811 Montrose Rd. Suite 215  
Potomac, Maryland 20854**

**Maryland House Ways & Means Committee**

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Good afternoon, Chairwoman Kaiser and members of the Committee.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. My name is Dr. Michael Lewis. I am the President and Founder of the Brain Health Education and Research Institute, a nonprofit organization I started upon my retirement at the end of a thirty year career in the U.S. Army in order to continue the research and educational endeavors I undertook while on active duty.

For the past eight years, I also have been in private practice in Potomac, where my entire patient population is those who are suffering the lingering ill effects of concussions and brain injuries.

I am also a lifelong advocate of team sports, first as an athlete growing up, and as a father of a teenaged son who continues to play contact sports.

I am a founding member of the Pop Warner Youth Sports Medical Advisory Committee because I, too, am concerned about both the health of our youth as well as the health of youth sports.

While I believe there is well-placed concern for the health of our youth playing contact sports, I think the concerns are ill-conceived out of fear. My concerns lay more with the decreasing participation in youth sports and the concomitant increasing rates of childhood obesity.

Pop Warner and USA Football are taking effective steps towards decreasing risks of, not only head injuries, but all injuries. I can tell you that Pop Warner, the oldest youth football organization in the nation, is not afraid to make bold changes in the interest of its young athletes.

But those sound policies on player safety are driven by one thing ..... Science. Sound public policy should follow the same criteria. My Medical Advisory Committee colleagues are neurosurgeons, neurologists, pediatricians, sports medicine professionals, and medical researchers. Collectively, we study the data that is required before deciding on a rule.

In the case of the amendment in this bill that would ban tackle for children, the science simply isn't there. There are no reliable studies that show young people are at greater risk for long-term neurological issues by playing tackle football before a certain age. We know because we have looked.

Nor is there medical evidence that tells us young people should be limited to 15 minutes of contact per week, as opposed to the maximum 65 minutes per week Pop Warner currently allows.

Even if well-intentioned, those two amendments are arbitrary approaches guided by fear, not data. For that reason, I respectfully ask you to reject them.

Thank you for your time.