

February 24, 2020

Delegate Terri Hill
Maryland House of Delegates
House Office Building, Room 214
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Delegate Hill

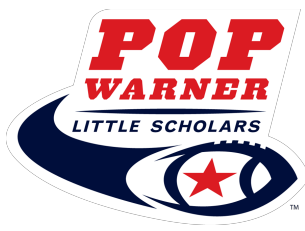
Thank you for the opportunity to work together on approaches that continue to make youth football a positive point in the lives of so many young people in Maryland. It is something we care about a great deal and look forward to sharing the approaches we're using nationally to make the game a better and safer experience.

Our Medical Advisory Committee of neurosurgeons, neurologists, pediatricians, sports medicine professionals and medical researchers has led the way in analyzing relevant data and research to guide our rules and protocols. Because nothing is more important than the young people we serve, we are unafraid of making changes based on a medical consensus. That medical consensus does not support restricting playing tackle based on a participant's age. For that reason, we would respectfully oppose any legislation that includes an arbitrary age limit to tackle football.

However, we think you can look to Pop Warner, USA Football and other youth football programs who are doing good work to limit contact and enhance the playing experience for the youngest ages.

For instance, **Pop Warner became the first national football organization of any kind to eliminate the three-point stance.** The ban - which went into effect for Pop Warner's three youngest divisions (ages 5-to-10 years old) this past season - is aimed at changing how offensive and defensive linemen engage in contact when the ball is snapped. Under the new rule, players must either be upright or in a modified squat position with their hands on their legs on the offensive and defensive lines. By moving away from the three-point stance at our youngest levels we are reducing contact points.

We also **banned kickoffs for our four youngest divisions.** Instead of kicking the ball off, players in our four youngest groups (5-11 years old) will now start with the ball at the 35-yard line after a score or to start a half.



We are also strong advocates of USA Football's Football Development Model, and we offer Flag Football and modified tackle (Rookie Tackle) as options for those not yet ready for tackle.

Other initiatives include:

- **To teach kids how to better recognize if they or a teammate have suffered a concussion**, Pop Warner is partnering with Stanford University and TeachAids to offer players, parents and coaches access to [CrashCourse](#), an interactive concussion education program that uses Virtual Reality to teach them how to spot a concussion.
- **Pop Warner restricts contact to only 25 percent of practice time at all age levels**, no more than 65 minutes of contact per week during the season. We think this strikes the proper balance for teaching the fundamentals while limiting contact.
- **Pop Warner coaches are mandated to train in USA Football's Heads Up Football** coaching training and certification every year.
- In 2012, **Pop Warner banned full-speed head-on, blocking or tackling drills** where players lined up more than 3 yards apart.
- **We implemented the first youth sport concussion policy** where a participant removed from play due to a head injury may not return to Pop Warner activities until he or she is evaluated and receives written clearance by a licensed medical professional trained in the evaluation and management of concussions.
- While not required, the majority of Pop Warner leagues follow an [Age-Weight schematic](#), where players are slotted into a division by their age and their weight.

Again, thank you for your leadership on this issue. Please let us know if we can help advance any smarter, safer approaches to football in Maryland.

Sincerely,

Jon Butler
Executive Director