

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF  
DOUGLAS J. PHILLIPS  
(REPRESENTATIVE OF SHANTRES SHAW)**

**IN SUPPORT OF LEGISLATIVE BILL HB 836  
ELIJAH GORHAM ACT**

**TESTIMONY DATE: MARCH 3, 2022**

Hello, my name is Douglas J. Phillips. I am the attorney for Ms. Shantres Shaw, the mother of Elijah Gorham. As her attorney, I have spent many hours over the past months reviewing Elijah's specific case and gathering information on the needs and challenges facing athletes and coaches in Maryland. Our thinking from the very start was, "How can future tragedies be prevented?" Today, I am here to provide oral testimony in support of **House Bill 836 Elijah Gorham Act**.

Like many thousands of parents in Maryland, Ms. Shaw poured her efforts into her son Elijah, who became a devoted son and brother, a motivated student, and a key contributor to the State Champion Mergenthaler Mustangs football program. Indeed, on the day he suffered a traumatic brain injury, Elijah had scored a touchdown on a kick return and racked up yardage as an elusive wide receiver. Elijah did what we want all of our children to do—he was the consummate competitor and teammate.

In the second half of the showdown between Mergenthaler and Dunbar High School, a play was called to throw the ball to Elijah running swiftly down the field to the end zone. That play, a routine play that Elijah had practiced many times, was the last time that Elijah was able to move. As Ms. Shaw will tell the committee, there were delays in recognizing Elijah's issues, responding to the issues, and getting Elijah the medical care he needed.

I am testifying today because I want to underscore that Elijah's death was not some isolated or miraculous exception to an otherwise highly-functioning system. The standard of care afforded to many student athletes in Maryland high schools is low. I have personally coached varsity high

school lacrosse, I have reviewed the records in Elijah’s case, and I have spoken with countless other high school coaches and athletes across the state. Few are surprised that a student athlete in Maryland “fell through the cracks”, even if they are shocked that it happened in a well-attended game, at a prime location, near a world-class trauma hospital. The fact that Elijah’s accident happened on the field at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute—arguably one of Maryland’s crown jewel public high schools—despite being a reasonable distance from University of Maryland’s Shock Trauma unit, ought to command all of our attention. If a death like this can occur at a game with full stands a short drive from Shock Trauma, it can occur anywhere—in an off season practice session in a small high school or a league championship at an urban school.

Ms. Shaw has a strong moral compass and, together, we have worked several months to distill her thoughts and our knowledge about how to prevent future deaths. The Elijah Gorham Act is a down payment on making sure preventable deaths like Elijah’s never happen again in Maryland.

Thank you for listening to my testimony and the experiences of the courageous Shaw-Gorham family.

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