

Mike Schilpp

From: Mike Schilpp
Sent: Monday, February 3, 2025 6:35 PM
To: Nancy Berg
Subject: Senate Bill 0112/House Bill 0462

I am asking you forward this email to all Athletic Directors you may have contact with in your associations.

As some of you are aware, there is a critical shortage of sports officials in the State of Maryland. Officials are leaving at an alarming rate due to the abuse we are taking from parents/coaches and players.

We are trying to pass legislation (Senate 0112/House Bill 0462) in Annapolis to will protect all sports officials from assaults. The bill provides law enforcement with the ability to make an arrest with probable cause if an official is physically assaulted. Today, there is no law that protects us - just the person committing the assault - as an officer can not make an arrest unless they see the individual commit the act.

With the departure of sports officials every year, so many high school events if not already will be affected. Your events could be postponed due to not enough officials available for your contest.

Senate Bill 0112 already had a hearing in the Judicial Committee on January 16th. Through many meetings with the Senators on the committee - we believe we have secured enough votes to get the bill to the full senate for a vote. There is only one obstacle - Senator Will Smith from Montgomery County and the Chairman of the committee has yet to put the bill up for a committee vote. We need your help - I am asking all Directors to please call Senator Smith's office at 410-841-3634 or email his office at will.smith@senate.state.md.us - tell him you need sports officials for your athletics - and they should be protected. Maryland is one of 23 states that does not have a law.

If you feel you can help - the time is now. If you should send an email - please include me on it so I can add it to the testimony for the bill. Send it to mike@sherwoodforestclub.org.

Thank you in advance for your time.

Michael Schilpp
President
Baltimore Best Umpires Association

Mike Schilpp

From: Cory Ludwin <cludwin@referee.com>
Sent: Friday, January 10, 2025 8:25 AM
To: Mike Schilpp
Subject: FW: Your Voice is Needed to Protect Maryland Sports Officials

From: NASO Communications <communications@naso.org>
Sent: Thursday, January 9, 2025 3:45 PM
To: Cory Ludwin <cludwin@referee.com>
Subject: Your Voice is Needed to Protect Maryland Sports Officials



PRESS RELEASE

Your Voice is Needed to Advance Legislation in Maryland

Sports officials are often victims of menacing harassment or assault and it's time to take action in Maryland. Proposed legislation to protect sports officials was voted down in the judicial committee in 2020 and 2024.

There is good news, however. Senator Justin Ready introduced bipartisan Senate Bill 0112 along with eight State Senator co-sponsors. Delegates Stuart Schmidt and Ric Metzgar have co-sponsored the bill in the Maryland House. The first reading is on January 8, and it will be scheduled for a Judicial committee hearing soon after that.

A summary of the bill is as follows: *Prohibiting a person from intentionally causing physical injury to another if the person knows or has reason to know that the other is an official, umpire, referee, or judge officiating at a sporting event; authorizing a police officer to arrest a person without a warrant if the police officer has probable cause to believe that the person has committed a certain assault; and generally relating to second degree assault.*

Assault Bill/Harassment Bill Supporting Points

Courtesy of the National Association of Sports Officials (<https://www.naso.org/survey/>)

- The average age of sports officials across the country is 57 years old (up from the 2017 Survey of 53 years old).
- Nearly 51% of male officials have felt unsafe or feared for their safety in connection to officiating. (Up 3%)
- Nearly 53% of female officials have felt unsafe or feared for their safety in connection to officiating. (Up 6%)
- 68% of sports officials believe that sportsmanship is getting worse. (Up 11%) Youth, adult recreation and high school levels are identified as the worst sportsmanship levels.
- 59% of officials and officiating leaders cite that most new officials quit within the first 1-3 years.
- 13% of officials have been assaulted by either a fan, coach, or player.
- The average starting age for a sports official is now 40-45 years old. Thirty years ago, the average starting age for a sports official was 20-25 years old.

You can find the senator from your district [HERE](#) and contact them.

Sports cannot function without officials. Please consider the importance to our communities that youth sports carry, and remember how important your voice as a voter and as an official truly is in this effort to ensure the safety of all sports officials in Maryland.

For more information on legislation affecting sports officials, visit www.naso.org/resources/legislation.

Contact: Joe Jarosz

Associate Editor

Referee Magazine/National Association of Sports Officials

jjarosz@referee.com

About the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO)

NASO, based in Racine, Wis., is a not-for-profit educational organization and is the world's largest organization for sports officials at every level and all sports. 30,000 sports officials from around the world belong to NASO, enjoying member benefits and supporting an organization that advocates for sports officials and that helps them maintain the highest level of officiating skills. Founded in 1980, NASO is governed by a 12-member board of directors coming from numerous sports and organizations. For more information, visit the NASO website at NASO.org

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National Association of Sports Officials, 2017 Lathrop Ave, Racine, WI 53405, United States

Assaults on officials raise doubts about the future of youth sports

Illustration by ESPN

- Maya A. Jones
- Sara Coello

May 23, 2024, 08:00 AM ET

Share

THE FUZZY VIDEO taken by a spectator at a girls' high school basketball game in Bourbon, Indiana, doesn't explain why the July 2023 event erupted in chaos, but it does make clear who was the target of players' and their coach's ire: referee Jessica Harrison. Running for her life, Harrison is seen on the video being yanked by the hair, wrestled to the floor, pummeled and kicked repeatedly by an angry crowd of players and at least one coach from the losing Ohio team. That's just one instance among scores of other video examples on social media of violence and threats directed at the people officiating youth and high school sports competitions.

The videos and news headlines from around the country document a major reason game officials are quitting their jobs in droves: The escalating rates of abuse from parents and coaches outweigh whatever rewards officiating might bring. The future of youth sports, with consistent league play and predictable schedules, will be increasingly at risk if deteriorating decorum isn't held in check. Some local parents' organizations are forming with the support of officiating organizations to warn that, without a greater show of respect for referees and umpires, the game might not go on.

Officials are quitting at such high rates that the pipeline of experienced officials for higher-level sports could be affected. Even the NCAA is taking note of the potentially negative future effects on recruitment for college officiating. State lawmakers are responding with laws to crack down on anyone who thinks it's OK to take out their anger on referees.

Already 32 states have strengthened existing assault laws to carve out a special designation for sports officials and boost penalties against those who threaten or attack them. Punishments, depending on the state and the severity of the offense, range from being banned from future sporting events to serving 99 years in prison. The New Hampshire legislature has put the final touches on such a bill, and several other states have bills under legislative debate.

"I've been there, and I've been harassed as a coach," said Sen. Lou D'Allesandro, a New Hampshire Democrat. "... My family has been harassed in the stands when I was coaching. I was harassed as a player when I played, and now I see that harassment transferred to the officials, and that's just manifested a thousandfold."

D'Allesandro introduced a bill this year to impose escalating civil penalties. The proposal would include a one-year ban on any involvement in sporting activities for people who

assault, harass or threaten officials. The bill's 16 co-sponsors are evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans, reflecting that this is one of the few issues in the country where both parties agree on the need for action.

Signs encourage fans to remain calm and avoid yelling at game officials in Broken Arrow, Okla., on May 5, 2018. Brian Barlow, a youth soccer referee, started a program to combat referee abuse, and it includes signage for youth sports complexes. Nick Oxford/The New York Times

Kevin Flynn, an official who helped write D'Allesandro's bill, said he was motivated by "increased hostility towards officials from parents and spectators and coaches. We've seen a lot of viral video of officials getting punched out, getting bumped, getting harassed at their cars after a game. And we thought that it's time to try to put some downward pressure on that kind of antagonism."

The stresses are taking a particular toll on officiating in football, soccer, basketball and hockey, with games being postponed or canceled because of officiating shortages. The National Association of Sports Officials and other organizations are working to recruit referees while seeking solutions to keep referees safe from unruly coaches and spectators. Surveys indicate that safety concerns and abuse are the main driving forces behind the referee exodus.

In a 2023 NASO survey of 35,813 sports officials, nearly 69% cited a deterioration in sportsmanship as a major concern. That response marked an almost 10 percentage point increase from similar responses in a 2017 survey. More than 40% of the 2023 respondents cited unruly parents attending youth sporting events as the biggest problem.

Coretta Lee, a grandmother and longtime youth sports official, said she loves doing this work because it's "fun-fun." But she told a New Hampshire legislative committee in January that the physical and verbal abuse has turned her children away from their one-time goal of following in Lee's footsteps. "My 24-year-old says, 'No way!' She will not officiate. ... She will not do it because when they're sitting in the stands, they hear the things that are said to us."

In the 2023 assault against Harrison in Indiana, visiting Ohio coach Laquita Carter was arrested and charged with felony criminal battery and felony criminal confinement. Texas, Indiana and Ohio are among the states that do not have laws to specifically protect sports officials. Opponents question why it's necessary to carve out a special victims designation when existing assault laws might be sufficient.

Organizations like NASO argue that an additional deterrent is needed to send a stronger message to would-be attackers about the legal consequences. They say that game officials need the same special legal status as public servants or health care workers. The 22 states that already have such laws can apply extra penalties beyond standard assault convictions. More than a dozen states -- including four that already have referee assault laws on the books -- weighed new bills this year aimed at boosting protections.

Taunting and trash talk aren't new concepts in sports. The 1888 poem "Casey at the Bat" by Ernest Thayer popularized the idea of vengeance when fans don't like the umpire's calls:

*From the benches, black with people, there went up a muffled roar,
Like the beating of the storm-waves on a stern and distant shore;
"Kill him! Kill the umpire!" shouted someone on the stand;*

And it's likely they'd have killed him had not Casey raised his hand.

Drawing from that theme, the 1950 film "Kill the Umpire," starring William Bendix, further popularized the chant. There are a few, isolated examples from the past century of people actually taking the chant seriously. But those rare cases pale in comparison to the frightening anti-referee tenor of many youth sporting events in recent years.

Even as far back as the early 2000s, observers warned of a dangerous trend of parents resorting to violence when they disagreed with officiating or coaching decisions.

"This new violence does not involve the young players themselves," wrote Dianna K. Fiore in 2003 in the Villanova Sports & Entertainment Law Journal. "Instead, coaches, parents, umpires, referees, and spectators have all been contributing to what is now an epidemic of unnecessary violence in youth sports known as 'sports rage' and 'parental rage.'"

She added: "Unfortunately, parents and other adults have committed senseless violent acts with little or no consequence, inadvertently transmitting an example to children that violence wins."

Basketball referee Perry Woodward recovers at University Medical Center in Las Vegas on May 19, 2022. He was attacked two days earlier after a coach took issue with his officiating at a recreational basketball game. Steve Marcus/Las Vegas Sun/AP
PART OF THE current problem, said Texas football referee Rodney Allison, is the relative inexperience of coaches and game officials, many installed to fill vacancies created during the pandemic. He characterized them as "just dads that have no training."

Add unruly spectators to the mix, and the potential escalates for things to go wrong. "It's just a lack of this civility and decorum," Allison said. "I see that. We're easy targets. We're the guys out on the field making calls." Allison had played football as a youth and into high school, so the thought of becoming an official and being back around the game excited him, he said. Being on the field was fun, but he said a noticeable decline in respect for officials at lower-level youth games began causing problems not just for referees but players as well.

"These are kids out there playing a game and we're just officials out there trying to officiate, and I don't know why people think this stuff is life and death because it's not," Allison said. "It's just so minuscule and it comes down on us a lot."

Dr. Robert Saul, a University of South Carolina pediatrics professor emeritus, said the decline in decorum reflects a broader, national cultural trend. "I think we have lost our

moral compass in our country," he said. "But I think it's reasonably straightforward. I think one of the big problems is we don't treat each other as citizens. Citizens care about each other. Citizens take care of each other. And so it's become more *me* instead of *us*."

The widely televised, angry antics of politicians at the national level have their own way of conveying to the public that the social etiquette rules have changed, and that brash, bold, in-your-face confrontations are the accepted new norm.

"I think it's getting worse just because the political climate has really sort of forced us into our own bunkers," Saul said. "And we don't like to meet in the middle. Now, sports is a great place for that to happen so I would hope that we'll continue to do that."

Football referee Alfredo Gracia lies on the ground on Dec. 3, 2020, after being attacked by high school player Emmanuel Duron during a game in Edinburg, Texas. Duron, now 22, was convicted of assault and recently received a year's probation. Joel Martinez/The Monitor/AP

The violence isn't directed only at game officials. In August 2022 at a game in Lancaster, Texas, 43-year-old youth league football coach Michael Hickmon was shot to death in front of young players, spectators and coaches. The incident reportedly stemmed from an argument over the game's score. The moments leading up to the tragedy were captured on video and quickly circulated on social media.

Hickmon's wife, Kenyetta, said her husband picked up a football from the field and was ready to head home when the confrontation started. According to witnesses, former NFL player Aqib Talib crossed the field and approached a referee in a heated exchange about an officiating call. The argument escalated to a brawl with Hickmon caught in the middle. More people joined the fight. Then gunshots. Hickmon was shot and killed. Talib was not charged but his brother, Yaqub Talib, pleaded guilty and is now serving a 37-year prison sentence. Tyrek Greene serves as a line judge at a youth soccer match in Fairfield, Ohio, on April 9, 2022. He said an angry mother once screamed in his face as he was officiating a soccer game for 9-year-olds. Brian Kaiser/The New York Times

SOME STATE LEGISLATURES have tried but failed to strengthen their laws, often because lawmakers don't see the urgency. Others face opposition from groups working to reform prison systems and reduce reliance on incarceration as a solution to crime.

In Ohio, state senators balked at a yearslong effort by Republican state Rep. Bill Roemer to pass protection laws that included stiffer incarceration penalties. He advanced a two-strike process, wherein a first assault against a referee would cost the offender \$1,500 and 40 hours of community service, while any subsequent attacks would constitute fifth-degree felonies, the same as would apply to an attack on a public school gym teacher or bus driver. It passed the state House in November but still awaits action in the Senate.

"We've seen something like a 60% or 70% -- it might be 100% -- increase in violence against sports officials in the last five years in Ohio," Roemer said. "We've had games in

Ohio canceled because there were no sports officials. We don't want this, we want the kids to benefit."

In Massachusetts, 900 people left the officiating ranks in hockey between 2019 and 2021. School football games had to be rescheduled because of a referee shortage. The shortage coincided with the pandemic, but polling indicates the retention problem persists because of harassment.

Lawmakers are weighing a bill to impose a series of penalties for assaults against sports officials, and game venues would be required to post signs warning of the legal repercussions.

Testimony by officials reflects their nervousness at how quickly violence can escalate at games. In the NASO survey, more than half of respondents, male and female, said they felt unsafe or feared for their safety because of abusive behavior. Among new referees, 80% of respondents said they decided to quit within two years because of rude or abusive parents or coaches.

"I think that there are some nights where you walk off the field questioning why we do this," said North Texas football official Julien Tagnon, 23. He added that newly hired referees "are not staying on" and "that's the issue. It's retention more than anything."

Former Texas youth football referee Brock Price, 22, is a good example. He said he needed only one season to realize this job wasn't for him. Price played football in high school and college. His father had spent years as a referee, so the transition to officiating seemed like a natural fit, Price said. But it was hard enough to balance the demands of his full-time job as a construction superintendent with game schedules, long days and tiresome drives to and from games.

He lasted 20 games. The angry taunts and threats from coaches and spectators solidified his decision to finish the season and never return. "I understand we're not perfect," Price said. "But it wasn't worth my time to deal with coaches and their attitude towards us officials."

That is what particularly worries authorities at the college level. A shortage hasn't materialized yet, according to Ben Brownlee, the NCAA associate director of officiating, but the NCAA does keep an eye on the pipeline. He met recently with several state referee associations to strategize on recruitment and retention.

"When you're only retaining 20 to 30% after three years, then obviously that's a trend that can't be supported," said Michael Fitch, executive director of the Texas Association of Sports Officials. His association has developed new retention plans, including policies to keep referees safe during games and mentorship programs to help guide new referees who may benefit from the guidance of veterans.

Recognizing the exodus and the danger it poses to the future of youth sports, the St. Louis Sports Foundation launched a program called Let 'Em Play to remind parents why civility is important to the future of youth sports. On the Let 'Em Play website and signage on the field, the reminders state that "games cannot happen without referees" and ask adults to think twice before "shouting angrily" at them. A similar program has been launched in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma.

The NASO survey cites parents, followed by coaches, overwhelmingly as the main sources of abusive behavior. Whatever their reasons for lashing out, authorities say, the adults are sending exactly the wrong message to young people about the proper way to resolve disagreements.

"Is this really what you want to be modeling for your kids?" asked Rick Weissbourd, psychologist and senior lecturer at Harvard Graduate School of Education. He added that it is the responsibility of parents to police themselves and not be afraid to speak up when other parents are behaving badly. "I think they just need to realize that we're just normal people," Fitch said. "We're moms, dads, brothers, sisters, just like everybody else."

SB0112 Support Letters

January 2025

From: wrestlnlarry@verizon.net <wrestlnlarry@verizon.net>
Sent: Monday, January 6, 2025 1:04 PM
To: will.smith@senate.state.md.us <will.smith@senate.state.md.us>;
marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us <marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us>
Cc: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>
Subject: Senate Bill 112

State Senators,

I fully support the above Senate Bill 112. I have been a Baseball Umpire for College, HS and the Cal Ripken Experience for 46yrs now, a Volleyball Official and a HS Wrestling Coach as well. This Bill will provide some level of safety for all Sports Officials in the State of Maryland. I have been assaulted during a baseball game at Overlea HS during an Adult Semi-Pro game. Though I was not severely injured that time, a law discouraging unruly assaultive behavior would be very helpful in protecting officials of sporting events in Maryland. Thank you.

Lawrence T. Shepard Jr

From: Joseph Schmitz <jfschmitz524@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, January 3, 2025 1:33 PM
To: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>
Subject: Senate Bill 0112 Protecting Sports Officials

Mike:

I am writing as a High School Volleyball referee and an assigner for referees in Baltimore City and the surrounding counties.

I support any legislation protecting Sports officials.

Thank you,

Joe Schmitz

BBOWS VB Assigner

From: Bayside Basketball <bboa157@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, January 3, 2025 12:24 PM

To: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>

Subject: Bill- 0112

Mike,

Good day, I am Secretary for Board 157 on the Eastern Shore. Our Executive Board would like to help get behind this important legislation.

Can you please provide additional information on what details our members should include in the letter and who the letter should be addressed to?

We will try and generate interest from our members.

Best

Mike Freiberg

BBOA157

P.O. Box 4121

Salisbury, Md. 21803

www.iaabo157.org

From: Orville Penn <oppenn@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, January 6, 2025 2:17 PM

To: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>

Subject: Support of Legislation

I sent my State Senator a letter in support of the legislation.

B. Orville Penn

January 2, 2025

To: The Honorable Justin Ready

Re: SB0112/HB1469: Criminal Law - Second Degree Assault - Sports Official

Dear Senator Ready,

I write to you today in support of SB0112/HB1469: Criminal Law - Second Degree Assault - Sports Official. I have been associated with one of the official's groups in Maryland for the past 20 years. In that time, I have witnessed the increase in escalating violence and threats against sports officials. On more than one occasion, the local law enforcement has had to be called to escort officials to their cars after events. I have witnessed spectators go to their cars and return to the field area with a firearm. I have witnessed officials being followed to their cars by what could be considered an angry mob of parents, being threatened, their faces, vehicles and license plates being recorded and posted to message boards. These actions not only threaten the official in the moment, but it also causes concerns for their families. Families worry not only for their loved one's safety and well-being but that the officials will be followed to their residence. Officials have the authority to eject spectators from the event venue, but then that sets up a scenario where the person lies in wait for the official.

I greatly appreciate you championing this bill, and hope that it will become law. Officials have no recourse to defend themselves. The situations are becoming more frequent, more violent, and increasingly concerning. It is only a matter of time until there is a reportable assault, or worse. Let's get this law into place, and publicized at all events, before personal harm comes to pass.

Thank you

Kelley Flanders

Odenton, MD

Anne Arundel County

5
From: Joel C <jcorona29@outlook.com>

Sent: Wednesday, January 1, 2025 11:54 PM

To: marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us <marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us>

Cc: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>

Subject: Can you help? Senator Bill 0112

Joel Corona

2109a E Boundary ave

Baltimore, MD 21237

jcorona29@outlook.com

443-560-4214

January 1, 2025

Dear Senator Dulany-James,

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I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 0112, which is aimed at providing greater protections for sports officials in Maryland. I am a 21-year-old umpire working out of Baltimore County. Officiating has helped me pay for college and as an active member of the officiating community, I am deeply concerned about the rising incidents of violence and harassment directed at officials during sports events, and I believe that this legislation is critical in ensuring the safety and well-being of all those involved.

There are over 37,000 sports officials in Maryland who currently have no legal protection against violence while performing their duties. The lack of protection puts not only the officials at risk but also undermines the integrity of sports events and disrupts the fair and respectful environment that athletes and coaches rely on. Senate Bill 0112 offers a much-needed safeguard, ensuring that those who dedicate their time to officiating can do so without fear of physical harm or personal danger.

I respectfully urge you to lend your support to this bill. As an advocate for the safety of all Marylanders, your backing would be instrumental in ensuring that sports officials receive the respect and protection they deserve. This legislation is crucial for the future of sports officiating in our state, and I believe it will have a profound positive impact on the community.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am hopeful that you will support Senate Bill 0112 and help create a safer environment for Maryland's sports officials.

Sincerely,
Joel Corona
BBUA Umpire

7
From: Bill Cooke <billcooke730@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 31, 2024 3:59 PM
To: marydulaney.james@senate.st.md.us <marydulaney.james@senate.st.md.us>
Cc: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>
Subject: Fwd: SB 0112 2nd degree assault-sportd officials

Bill Cooke
410 241 8799

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Bill Cooke <billcooke730@gmail.com>
Date: Tue, Dec 31, 2024 at 3:54 PM
Subject: SB 0112 2nd degree assault-sportd officials
To: <will.smith@senate.state.md.us>, <marydulany.james@senate.st.md>
Cc: <Mike@sherwoodfprestclub.org>

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Senators,

Please support sports officials throughout MD by passing Senate Bill 0112. We are losing officials every season due to the abuse we are receiving from some parents and coaches. Most officials are doing this work for the love of the game and for supplementary income. We are requesting that we be allowed to do this work without abuse. Without officials, the youth of our state will not be able to participate in athletics.

Thank you in advance for passing this bill.

William J. Cooke

HCUA, NEMOA, AAUA

9
From: ROBERT COLLINS <pirerpers@aol.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 31, 2024 12:44 PM

To: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>
Subject: Senate Bill 0112 Protecting Sports Officials

Mike

As President of the Norther Delaware Football officials Association I support your efforts to get Senate Bill 0112

10 Approved in the State of Maryland. I have attached the Delaware Law that is now in place. I don't have statistics but there have been arrest and prosecution of persons violating the Delaware Law.

Bob Collins

President NDFOA

2023 Delaware Code

Title 11 - Crimes and Criminal Procedure

Chapter 5. SPECIFIC OFFENSES

Subchapter II. Offenses Against the Person

§ 614. Abuse of a sports official; class G felony; class A misdemeanor.

Universal Citation:

11 DE Code § 614 (2023)

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PreviousNext

§ 614. Abuse of a sports official; class G felony; class A misdemeanor.

(a) A person is guilty of abuse of a sports official whenever the person intentionally or recklessly commits the following acts against a sports official who is acting in the lawful performance of duty:

- (1) Reckless endangering in the second degree, as set forth in § 603 of this title; or
- (2) Assault in the third degree, as set forth in § 611 of this title; or
- (3) Terroristic threatening, as set forth in § 621 of this title; or
- (4) Criminal mischief, as set forth in § 811 of this title.

(b) For purposes of this section, the words "sports official" shall mean any person who serves as a registered, paid or volunteer referee, umpire, line judge or acts in any similar capacity during a sporting event. For purposes of this section, the words, "lawful performance of duty" means the time immediately prior to, during and/or immediately after the sporting event.

(c) Whoever violates subsection (a) of this section shall be guilty of a class A misdemeanor. Upon conviction for a second or subsequent offense under this section, such person shall be guilty of a class G felony. Notwithstanding Chapter 42 of this title, such person shall be fined not less than \$1,000 nor more than \$2,350. In addition to the fines imposed by this subsection, any person who is guilty of abuse of a sports official shall be prohibited from participating in and/or attending any organized sporting event for a period of not less than 3 months nor more than 12 months.

(d) Except as provided in § 922 of Title 10, and notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, the Court of Common Pleas shall have original jurisdiction to hear, try and finally determine any violation of this section, and any other misdemeanor violation of any offense set forth in this title which was allegedly committed during the same incident. Prosecution under this section shall not preclude a separate charge, conviction and sentence for any other crime set forth in the Code.

67 Del. Laws, c. 247, § 1; 70 Del. Laws, c. 186, § 1; 74 Del. Laws, c. 342, § 1;

11
From: Chuck Harmon <ballgame1313@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 31, 2024 8:57 AM
To: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>
Subject: Maryland Bill 0112

As a long time official for baseball and football, I wholeheartedly support Bill 0112. We as officials, should feel safe in our work environments, and not subject to verbal and or physical abuse. Thank You for considering this bill, and willingness to make it law.

Sincerely,

Chuck Harmon

Sports Official

ballgame1313@yahoo.com

443-713-7518

12
From: Charlie Wilson <charliewx@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 31, 2024 7:58 AM
To: will.smith@senate.state.md.us <will.smith@senate.state.md.us>;
marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us <marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us>
Cc: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>
Subject: Senate Bill 0112 - Protecting Sports Officials

Hello Senator Smith and Senator Dulany-James,

I am writing in hopes that we have your support with Senate Bill 0112 - protecting sports officials . As president of our local sport officials association, and 40 years as a baseball official, I can't tell you the importance of having this bill passed. I have lost so many officials over the past several years due to unsportsmanlike conduct (verbal and physical), and because of this, not just my group, but the entire country has a severe sports official shortage. Understanding that each state has its own laws governing this (and some that have virtually nothing), for Maryland sports official associations to gain ground on recruitment and retention, the passing of this bill is paramount.

According to the National Federation of High School Associations, more than 50 percent of sports officials have feared for their safety at some point in their career because of administrator, coach, player or spectator behavior. Sadly, **nearly 12 percent of all officials who responded have been physically assaulted during or after a sporting event.** Take a look at these alarming statistics from the National Association of Sports Officials for the state of Maryland:

<https://www.naso.org/survey/portfolio/sporting-behavior-2023/>.

Thank you for your time.

Regards,

Charlie Wilson

President & Senior Training Lead

Interstate Baseball Umpires Association (IBUA)

From: Robert Stroup <rstroup22@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, December 30, 2024 1:10 PM

To: marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us <marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us>

Cc: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>

Subject: MD SB112

Dear Honorable Senator James,

I am sending you this email regarding MD SB112 that is on the docket for the 2025 Regular Session, which would make verbal or physical abuse a criminal act against all sports officials in Maryland.

Getting this bill passed into law would not only benefit just me, but it would benefit the thousands of other sports officials across Maryland for today and **for tomorrow.**

As you may or may not be aware of, there is a major shortage of sports officials not just in Maryland, but across this great country. Too many officials have quit because the abuse by coaches, parents, and others has increased so badly that being out on the field or on the court just does not seem safe anymore. This is where I am kindly asking for your help and support to see that MD SB112 is read, reviewed, and discussed so it can become law to help protect every sports official who steps onto a field or a court.

Personally, I have been living in Harford County since 1988 and I have been umpiring youth and men's baseball leagues in Harford County since 2002 as a member of the Harford County Umpires Association (HCUA). Over the years, I have seen the passion of the sport grow and also the intensity of those on and off the field. No official, me included, should have to worry about whether a call that was or was not made going to trigger someone to the point that either verbal abuse or physical abuse is a possibility. No official should ever need to worry about walking to their car after a game and wonder who is following them or waiting for them to take measures to the next level. Fortunately, this has not happened to me personally – yet! But I know it has happened to my fellow officials and that is a shame.

I am currently the President of HCUA, and I have asked my fellow members to also send you an email asking for your support and to even include a personal experience or two where an “ugly” encounter took place with a coach, parent, or someone else. I know of a few that have occurred, but I will allow my members to describe it in “their own words”.

I kindly and respectfully appreciate your attention to MD SB112, and I look forward to seeing this bill passed in 2025 so that I and my fellow sports officials will be at ease the next time we walk onto a field or court.

With sincere appreciation.

Thank you and have a great day!

Rob Stroup

President, HCUA

(410) 935-6943

From: Vance Morris <vance@chesapeake-solutions.com>

Sent: Tuesday, December 31, 2024 10:08 AM

To: justin.ready@senate.state.md.us <justin.ready@senate.state.md.us>;
will.smith@senate.state.md.us <will.smith@senate.state.md.us>

Cc: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>

Subject: SB 112

14

Dear Senators Will Smith and Senator Justin Ready,

As a swim official for high school, YMCA, and summer league competitions, and the president of both the Delmarva Swim Association and The Eastern Shore Swim Officials Association, I am writing to express my unequivocal support for Maryland Senate Bill 112, which seeks to protect sports officials by criminalizing assaults against them.

Officials play a critical role in ensuring the integrity, fairness, and safety of athletic competitions. Despite our commitment to fostering positive experiences for athletes and spectators alike, we are increasingly faced with hostility, verbal abuse, and, in some cases, physical violence from individuals who take the intensity of competition too far. The consequences of such actions extend beyond physical harm; they threaten the recruitment and retention of officials, the safety of our events, and the spirit of sportsmanship we strive to uphold.

Senate Bill 112 offers much-needed protections for officials by addressing these concerns. By prohibiting individuals from intentionally causing physical harm to referees, umpires, judges, and other officials during events and enabling law enforcement to act swiftly when such incidents occur, this legislation sends a strong message that abusive behavior will not be tolerated.

The shortage of sports officials is a nationwide crisis, and Maryland is not immune. Many individuals leave officiating due to safety concerns, leaving schools and leagues scrambling to fill vacancies. Protecting officials is not only a matter of personal safety but also a vital step toward sustaining the athletic programs that bring our communities together.

Sports are often heralded as teaching moments for young athletes—opportunities to learn resilience, respect, and teamwork. How can we claim to teach these values if those tasked with upholding the rules are left unprotected? By enacting Senate Bill 112, Maryland will set a precedent that aligns with the values of fairness, accountability, and respect for all participants in sports.

I respectfully urge you and your colleagues to support this legislation. The passage of Senate Bill 112 will protect those of us who dedicate our time and expertise to ensure a safe and equitable environment for athletes and spectators alike. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Vance Morris

President, Delmarva Swim Association

President, Eastern Shore Swim Officials Association

From: colin <cleisher147@hotmail.com>

Sent: Monday, January 6, 2025 8:12 PM

To: will.smith@senate.state.md.us; marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us; Mike Schilpp
<mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>

Subject: Senate Bill SB112

Dear Honorable Senator James,

I am sending you this email regarding MD SB112 that is on the docket for the 2025 Regular Session, which would make verbal or physical abuse a criminal act against all sports officials in Maryland.

Getting this bill passed into law would not only benefit me, but it would benefit the thousands of other sports officials across Maryland.

As you may or may not be aware of, there is a major shortage of sports officials not just in Maryland, but across this great country. Too many officials have quit because the abuse by coaches, parents, and others has increased so badly that being out on the field or on the court does not seem safe. This is where I am kindly asking for your help and support to see that MD SB112 is read, reviewed, and discussed so it can become law to help protect every sports official who steps onto a field or a court.

I have been umpiring youth and men's baseball leagues in Harford County since 2012 as a member of the Harford County Umpires Association (HCUA). Over the years, I have seen the passion of the sport grow and also the intensity of those on and off the field. No official should have to worry about whether a call that was or was not made is going to trigger someone to the point that either verbal abuse or physical abuse is a possibility. No official should ever need to worry about walking to their car after a game and wonder who is following them or waiting for them. Fortunately, this has not happened to me. But I know it has happened to my fellow officials and that is a shame.

I kindly and respectfully appreciate your attention to MD SB112, and I look forward to seeing this bill passed in 2025 so that I and my fellow sports officials will be at ease the next time we walk onto a field or court.

Sincerely,

Colin Leisher

HCUA Secretary

From: Judy Cole <judyuic@gmail.com>

Sent: Wednesday, January 8, 2025 11:02 AM

To: Jack Hutcherson <commish@usasoftballmddcde.org>

Cc: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>; Steve Zawierucha

<uicsteve@usasoftballmddcde.com>; Ralph Eggen <reggen@usasoftballmddcde.org>; Brad Jones
(ormond.b.jones@gmail.com) <ormond.b.jones@gmail.com>

Subject: Re: FW: Bill 0112

I support the bill also!

Judy Cole

From: Arentz, Steven Delegate <Steven.Arentz@house.state.md.us>
Sent: Wednesday, January 8, 2025 9:38 AM
To: Jack Hutcherson <commish@usasoftballmddcde.org>
Subject: RE: Bill 0112

Thanks Jack. I support the bill

Steve

From: Mark Jr <tmntjr69@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 8, 2025 12:15 PM
To: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>
Subject: Re: Senate Bill 0112

Mike,

Happy New Year.

I called the senators office and left a message. Let me know where the hearing ID as I can't see a location. I also broadcasted it on social media.

Reminder: I have been assaulted twice. Punched/stabbed

From: Michael Freiberg <mikefreiberg12@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 8, 2025 2:16 PM
To: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>
Subject: Bill- 0112

Michael Freiberg
130 Spinnaker Way
Chester, MD 21619

January 8th, 2025

Att: Senator Justin Ready

Dear Senator Ready,

I have been a High School Sports Official for over 25 years. I am in full support of Bill- 0112. Officials are at risk every time they take the court or field. This important Legislation will help to protect me and fellow officials.

Thank you,

Michael Freiberg.

mike

--

Best Regards

Michael Freiberg

From: rinbee@comcast.net <rinbee@comcast.net>

Sent: Friday, January 10, 2025 3:53 PM

To: marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us <marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us>;
will.smith@senate.state.md.us <will.smith@senate.state.md.us>

Cc: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>

Subject: Please Support MD SB0112

Dear Senators Dulaney-James and Smith,

I am writing to urge your support for MD SB0112. As a youth umpire for more than 20 years I have the pleasure of sharing the field with boys and girls playing the great game of baseball and quietly enjoying every great play. Unfortunately that joy is often tempered by abuse by coaches and parents. Fortunately I have not been victimized by physical abuse, but it does exist and the fear of verbal abuse turning violent is always in the back of my mind. There is only so much onfield officials can do to minimize the threat which is why this bill is so important to those of us who officiate sports and the children who play the games.

Your support of MD SB0112 will be greatly appreciated by everyone who enjoys youth supports.

Sincerely,

Ronald Bond

8 Willow Oak Court

Elkton, MD 21921

A proud member of the Harford County Umpires Association

From: Geoff Little <gblittle5@gmail.com>

Sent: Saturday, January 11, 2025 4:48 PM

To: marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us <marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us>

Cc: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>

Subject: MD Senate Bill 0112

Dear Honorable Senator James,

I am sending you this email regarding MD SB112 that is on the docket for the 2025 Regular Session, which would make verbal or physical abuse a criminal act against all sports officials in Maryland.

Getting this bill passed into law would not only benefit just me, but it would benefit the thousands of other sports officials across Maryland for today and **for tomorrow**.

As you may or may not be aware of, there is a major shortage of sports officials not just in Maryland, but across this great country. Too many officials have quit because the abuse by coaches, parents, and others has increased so badly that being out on the field or on the court just does not seem safe anymore. This is where I am kindly asking for your help and support to see that MD SB112 is read, reviewed, and discussed so it can become law to help protect every sports official who steps onto a field or a court.

Personally, I have been umpiring youth and men's baseball leagues in Harford County since 2022 as a member of the Harford County Umpires Association (HCUA). No official, me included, should have to worry about whether a call that was or was not made going to trigger someone to the point that either verbal abuse or physical abuse is a possibility nor should any official ever need to worry about walking to their car after a game and wonder who is following them or waiting for them to take measures to the next level.

I kindly and respectfully appreciate your attention to MD SB112, and I look forward to seeing this bill

passed in 2025 so that I and my fellow sports officials will be at ease the next time we walk onto a field or court.

Best,
Geoff Little
HCUA

From: rinbee@comcast.net <rinbee@comcast.net>
Sent: Friday, January 10, 2025 3:53 PM
To: marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us <marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us>; will.smith@senate.state.md.us <will.smith@senate.state.md.us>
Cc: Mike Schilpp <mike@sherwoodforestclub.org>
Subject: Please Support MD SB0112

Dear Senators Dulaney-James and Smith,

22
I am writing to urge your support for MD SB0112. As a youth umpire for more than 20 years I have the pleasure of sharing the field with boys and girls playing the great game of baseball and quietly enjoying every great play. Unfortunately that joy is often tempered by abuse by coaches and parents. Fortunately I have not been victimized by physical abuse, but it does exist and the fear of verbal abuse turning violent is always in the back of my mind. There is only so much onfield officials can do to minimize the threat which is why this bill is so important to those of us who officiate sports and the children who play the games.

Your support of MD SB0112 will be greatly appreciated by everyone who enjoys youth supports.

Sincerely,

Ronald Bond
8 Willow Oak Court
Elkton, MD 21921

A proud member of the Harford County Umpires Association

23
Dear Senator,

I'm writing for support of 2025 Maryland Senate Bill 0112 - Protecting Sports Officials in Maryland. In recent years, I've seen many instances of youth sports officials quitting because of threats of violence and in some cases, actual assault. In my 18 years on the field, I've seen many cases of what some people would call "passionate fans", but when those fans are threatening the officials such as "I'll see you in the parking lot", we need alternate ways of protection aside from the classic fight or flight. I acknowledge we could suspend the game until the police come to remove that threat, but the response time could be impacted especially if the game is in a remote area.

Youth sports aren't the only games impacted by a lack of Officials. The National Federation of High School sports have reported about a 30% attrition rate due to violence against Officials and threats thereof. In all cases, the lack of Officials have led to countless games being canceled or postponed - and even more having fewer than the usual number of Officials on the playing field. As an example, in high school baseball there are usually 2 Officials on the field. Many games have been contested with only 1 official. With proper laws and protection, we can improve the quality and retention of sports officiating.

To conclude, I urge you to vote favorably on Senate Bill 0112. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Very Respectfully,

Paul A. Golden

Dundalk, MD (District 6)

BBUA Umpire

Re: Senate Bill 0112

Dear Senator,

24
I have been a referee/ umpire/ official for over 5 years now. I can not tell you the number of times that in the heat of the moment, or simply because someone wants to win or have their child win, that they dispute a call. It is not to say that they are a bad person, I just simply believe that they are not thinking of their action or what they are saying at that given moment. Typically, not professional, use of foul language or a gesture. I have thick skin, and I would not do it if I did not. However, I do have the ability to somewhat control the flow with technical fouls to a coach or player, a flag, or even removal if it escalates too far. Sadly though, there is an underlying fear that actions taken to these individuals could cause back lash after the game is over or in some cases, even during the game. Please truly consider getting this bill passed to protect officials moving forward.

Thank you

Keith Dressel

Robert M. Limpert
1338 South Dahlia Rd.
Bel Air MD, 21015
Robert.limpert22@gmail.com
410-937-9027

1/3/2025

25
The Honorable Senator Mary-Dulany James
Maryland State Senate
James Senate Office Building, Room 103
11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401
marydulany.james@senate.state.md.us

Subject: Urgent Support for Senate Bill 112: Protecting Sports Officials

Dear Senator James,

I am writing to you as a current baseball umpire, former High School Administrator, former High Coach, former Recreation/Travel coach and Parent to express my strong support for Senate Bill 112. This legislation is crucial for enhancing the safety and well-being of sports officials in Maryland.

I have witnessed firsthand the increasing instances of verbal and physical abuse directed towards sports officials. This unacceptable behavior not only undermines the integrity of sporting events but also creates a hostile and intimidating environment for those who dedicate their time and expertise to ensuring fair play.

Senate Bill 112 takes a significant step in addressing this critical issue by:

- Clearly defining and criminalizing assaults against sports officials: By specifically recognizing assaults on officials as a distinct offense, this legislation sends a strong message that such behavior will not be tolerated.
- Empowering law enforcement: The provision authorizing warrantless arrests for certain assaults against officials provides law enforcement with the necessary tools to swiftly apprehend individuals who engage in these harmful acts.
- Promoting a safer environment for all: By deterring violence against officials, this bill will contribute to a safer and more positive experience for all participants in youth and adult sports.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 112. Protecting our sports officials is not only about ensuring their safety but also about upholding the values of sportsmanship, respect, and fair play that are essential for the healthy development of our young people.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Robert Limpert (Jan 3, 2025 09:50 EST)

Robert M. Limpert

Baseball umpire, former High School Administrator, former High Coach, former Recreation/Travel coach and Parent

To: MD State Senate Office of Senator Ready
Re: Senate Bill 0112

Dear Senator Ready,

I understand you are sponsoring and putting forward a bill to enact added protections towards Maryland Sports Officials due to acts of violence and/or harassment. I wish to extend my support for such legislation and protections.

26
I am a sports official here in Maryland. I still regularly umpire baseball games from men's levels to 8yr olds. I still regularly officiate basketball games, men's down to the little tykes learning to dribble the ball. I have done football, I have done soccer, I have done ice hockey.... I have officiated plenty of sports and, unfortunately, I have witnessed bad situations and even more unfortunately experienced even worse situations. I was physically assaulted in the '80s during a men's baseball game by an ejected player who returned after the game with one thing on his mind. If the other team had not jumped to my aid (I was already flat on my back) I am not sure just how far this attack could have gone. I was harassed with objects thrown at me all the way back to the car. More recently I was called into the middle of a football field after a partner was threatened/harassed by multiple fans and the head referee decided such threats were serious enough to warrant a call for the police and have all the fans removed from the site for our safety. I have been pulled off a basketball court by my supervisor due to referees in the adjacent court being threatened and we needed to leave the building for safety reasons.

As a sports official we are charged with having to make judgement calls and enforce rules. In my various training classes we were always taught: "for every whistle or non whistle, for every ball/strike, fair/foul, out/safe call that is or is not made...half the crowd will be disappointed with the official." "We need to have a thick skin." "We need to not hear everything, not take it personally." "The quicker you move to the next play the better so that the previous play does not have time to build to some sort of tipping point." We are completely unbiased in such actions, yet some fans, some coaches, some players take issue that we are against them, or their child, or the game itself.

Of course I have been yelled at, cursed at...I can take that....I have played sports, some of this is an attempt to get the official's attention in hopes a close call may go "their" way next time. I understand that, to some extent it's a part of the game. But there does need to be something in place on the rare occasion where a tipping point is reached, a line has been seriously crossed. To my dismay the current Maryland legal process restricts the level of assistance we can get from police who were not present to witness the altercation, we can expect to receive minimal, if any, assistance in determining who the perpetrators are and no rights to seek reparations since information is withheld w/o abilities to follow through. We sports officials wear the uniform, we've accepted that verbal harassment will happen and comes with the territory....but the uniform is looked upon as a bullseyes to some fans,

coaches, and players who feel they have been cheated, wronged, or simply because they have paid a fee they now have a right to advance that venting into a more physical nature with direct access to the source of that frustration.

We are seeking some added protections that similar "uniforms" are afforded here in Maryland....police, fire, emergency, state officials... I am not looking for the exact same levels of protection as the forementioned, I do not kid myself to hold us out to that level. But I do want to see a step forward where we have some rules in place to afford us a small added level of protection, some added assistance in seeking help when needed, some added assistance to recoup damages in those extreme cases. That the general public is made aware that we are working in an "official" capacity and that Maryland will acknowledge us as such and back us up accordingly.

I appreciate your efforts to help get this in front of your peers in the Maryland legislature and greatly appreciate your personal efforts to bring this matter to their attention. Any assistance you can help to bring these necessary protections will be very appreciated by all that wear the uniform.

Sincerely,
Frederick Leary
Harford County, Maryland
410-688-4652

December 30, 2024

SB0842_RichardKaplowitz_FAV

2/27/2022

Richard Keith Kaplowitz
Frederick, MD 21703-7134

TESTIMONY ON SB#0842 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Criminal Law - Second Degree Assault - Sports Official

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3. I am submitting this testimony in support of/ SB#/0842, Criminal Law - Second Degree Assault – Sports

During my thirty-one years as a soccer official, I was assaulted three different times. The National Association of Sports Officials has documented state legislative efforts to deal with the increasing problem of sport officials being assaulted.¹

In the journal *Global Sport Matters* article *Roughing Up the Refs...* Barry, Mano, founder and president of the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO) notes “It's harder to do this under this constant scrutiny...NASO estimates that 30 percent of officials have not returned during the pandemic - and of those, between 20 and 25 percent are expected to never come back.”²

I have been pushed, spit upon, had gear stolen, and deliberately tripped during my career, refereeing soccer matches at both youth and adult levels. The increase in incivility in our politics has spread to the fields on which games are being played. This bill makes the moral statement that improper conduct towards those who make playing our games safe and fun and equal for all is criminal when violence is applied towards officials. It adds a measure of protection for persons willing to step forward to help make games possible. The loss of an official who quits due to abuse or fear of physical abuse harms everyone who needs their services to conduct a game.

I urge Maryland to join the trend of states recognizing and dealing effectively with this problem.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB0842.

¹ <https://www.naso.org/resources/legislation/sports-officials-legislative-scorecard/>

² <https://globalsportmatters.com/business/2022/04/15/abusive-behavior-driving-youthsports-officials-away/>

February 27, 2024

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
Maryland Senate

The Honorable Jeff Waldstreicher
Vice-Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
Maryland Senate

**RE: Senate Bill 842 – Criminal Law – Second Degree Assault – Sports Official Position –
Favorable; Hearing Date: 2/27/2024 – Judicial Proceedings Committee**

Greetings Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I write to the Committee today to express my *strong support* for Senate Bill 842 that is the subject of the hearing on February 27, 2024, and under consideration by this body. I appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony on this proposed legislation and the important issue that it addresses.

To further understanding of the context and need for this legislation, I want to share with the Committee my personal experiences as a referee and my professional perspective as a public health practitioner and public policy researcher.

Life as a Sports Official

Firstly, in considering this bill, I implore you to listen to and read about the lived experiences of sports officials from across Maryland to understand the context of this issue.

For many, being a sports official is a critical element of their life and there is no one pathway to becoming an official. Some people become officials as a way to connect with their children or family that love the sport, others wish to earn a little extra money, but, mainly, sports officials are motivated by the wish to rekindle their love for the game and provide a service to the community.

For me, it was the love of the game and sense of community engagement that motivated me to become a soccer referee. By the time I reached high school, I could appreciate the important role that the officials played in ensuring that we were able to compete in a safe and fair manner. Subsequently, I decided to deviate from the player perspective to see the other side of the game. I took a day long soccer referee class that was held at my local university and started my career as a licensed soccer referee/official.

In the time since, I have been a licensed soccer official for nine years at all levels of amateur competition—from U9 recreational games on Saturday mornings to semi-professional matches and high school playoff finals. At this point, I officiated approximately 1,500-2,000 games.

Those nine years and hundreds of games are marked by dozens of amazing memories. Numerous sunny mornings where I got to see the unbridled fun of young soccer enthusiasts out on the field. Numerous opportunities to learn from experienced referees and then transfer that knowledge to

the young officials I had the opportunity to mentor. Those pleasant memories are what drive sports officials to wake up early on the weekend to officiate games; endure extreme heat, cold, and rain; and, generally, continue to be a sports official within our communities.

But those pleasant memories are marred with instances of abuse, threats, and physical violence. In my referee career, I have had coaches and athletic directors berate me until the point in which they have to be physically removed from the facility. Players and parents break out into physical fights that required the entire abandonment of a soccer match half-way through. Additionally, times in which spectators have threatened to stab me after a match and situations where the referee crew had to be escorted by police after the conclusion of a game to ensure our safety on the return home.

That is the life of a referee—days of pure joy engaging with your community mixed with times of pure fear for your safety and well-being.

For younger referees, especially, these situations are impactful. From an outside perspective, sports officiating is an ideal activity for young people. Young people are frequently still playing the sport or have less time removed from actively participating in the sport. It is an opportunity to have a first job, and creates occasion for responsibility, learning about communication, and working with others. Despite these somewhat ideal conditions, there is a shortage of younger sports officials in the United States as the average official is 57.1 years old.¹

A central factor to this lacking pipeline of younger officials is abuse—that is what I saw as a young referee. I experienced that coaches, parents, and team administrators often felt that it was easier to manipulate younger officials and that they were less likely to stand against abuse. Instead of being supportive, these hostile environments for younger sports drive younger individuals away. With the opportunistic approach to younger officials and the decrease in sportsmanship across the board, the situation of referee abuse has become untenable for younger officials.

Luckily, I was one of the young officials that could handle the abuse and apply good judgement when situations became unsafe, but those experiences hardened me as official. Looking back at my current referee career and considering the current state of referee abuse, I cannot see a future where I encourage young people to become sports officials. The potential risk is one's personal safety and well-being, especially for our children and young people, is too great—despite the great many benefits involved.

In the context of this legislation, I advocate strongly due to these lived, first-hand experiences. It is one thing to understand the objective impacts of abuse on sports officials, but another to see it every weekend. For what purpose it serves, I encourage the Committee to appreciate these real stories from the front lines and the experiences shared by my fellow Maryland officials.

Public Health and Safety at Community Sporting Events

¹ <https://www.naso.org/survey/portfolio/data-highlights-2023/>

Beyond my experience as a referee that illustrates the pervasive nature of referee abuse in Maryland and throughout the United States, I wanted to speak to Senate Bill 842 from my experiences as a public health practitioner and published academic.

Referee abuse is not simply about the stress and uncomfortable environment created by criticisms from event spectators, coaches, and other team officials, but it is critical to appreciate the potential for those situations of verbal commentary to escalate into situations of dire threats to physical safety. From an outsider's perspective, these situations of assaulting sports officials seem extremely remote. However, the occurrences of referee assault do occur.

For example, in 2023 alone, a Massachusetts referee was punched by player during a high school basketball game², a Michigan soccer referee was knocked down by a high school soccer player³, a Florida baseball umpire was punched in the head by a parent⁴, and an Alabama umpire was tackled by a coach in an 11U baseball game.⁵ These incidents are a selection of incidents across geographic regions and sports within the United States that were reported to authorities and described by local news sources.

However, more severe cases of violence against sports officials have occurred. In 2014, a Michigan referee who was officiating an amateur adult soccer match was punched in the head by a disgruntled player as the player was being ejected from the match.⁶ The referee, a father two, died two days later as a result of the attack and a memorial scholarship in his name now supports youth soccer referees going to college.⁷ Other tragic deaths have occurred as the result of attacks against officials in the United States. In a similar incident in 2013, a Utah soccer referee died after being punched in the head once by a youth soccer player.⁸ Additionally, in 2019, a disagreement in a soccer match resulted in two men attacking individuals with a machete that, thankfully, caused only minor injuries to three people.⁹ These worst case scenarios, while rare, demonstrate the potential life-changing risks that referees face upon the fields of play.

In addition to these instances realized acts of violence against sports officials, there are many situations where there are “near-misses”—situations where physical violence was threatened against a sport official or violence was unreported. From a referee perspective, recent research indicates that 50.9% of sport officials reported feeling unsafe or fearing for their safety because of the behavior of an administrator, coach, player, or spectator in 2023.¹⁰ Plainly, a review of the available evidence demonstrates that assaults on sports officials do occur resulting in physical injuries for some and fear among others.

² <https://www.wcvb.com/article/massachusetts-referee-punched-by-student-athlete/42360917>

³ <https://wwwmt.com/news/local/bangor-bloomingdale-soccer-game-referee-michigan-high-school-athletic-association-investigation-high-school>

⁴ <https://www.local10.com/news/local/2023/05/04/video-captures-parent-sucker-punching-umpire-at-florida-baseball-game-deputies-say/>

⁵ <https://brobible.com/sports/article/youth-baseball-coach-tackles-umpire/>

⁶ <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/wayne/2015/03/13/soccer-referee-sentencing/70258968/>

⁷ <https://www.michiganrefs.org/john-bieniewicz-memorial-scholarship/>

⁸ <https://www.nbcsports.com/soccer/news/utah-soccer-referee-dies-after-teen-punches-him-in-the-face>

⁹ <https://www.woodtv.com/news/southwest-michigan/machete-wielding-suspect-injures-3-after-dispute-over-soccer-game-in-bangor/2012269180/>

¹⁰ <https://www.naso.org/survey/portfolio/data-highlights-2023/>

From an overall public health perspective, these instances of referee abuse, in any form, are detrimental to these positive public health benefits of sports. Generally, sporting events provide a health benefit to all those involved. For the players and officials, it is an opportunity to be outdoors and engage in vigorous exercise. For spectators, coaches, and other participants, there are mental health benefits by providing an opportunity for community building and social engagement with one another, especially as the U.S. Surgeon General has declared an epidemic of loneliness and isolation.¹¹ But instances of assault against sports officials instead drive officials and others away, and there is never any benefit to the public's health from violence within the community.

Simply put, the protection of sports officials from assault is a matter of public health and safety for entire communities. While criminal statutes are punitive not preventative by nature, there is always the potential opportunity for a deterrent effect in individual cases. If there is one instance of assault on a sports official that is deterred from the presence of the proposed statute, the effort for this legislation will have been well worth it. One punch prevented can be one life saved, as demonstrated by the horrific referee assaults that occurred in Michigan and Utah.

Legal and Policy Parity

In addition to the personal experiences of sports officials and public health and safety considerations, I support the adoption of Senate Bill 842 as it puts the State of Maryland in better legal parity with other states regarding this issue. The concept of having specialized assault statutes that address violence committed against sports officials is not a new concept. At least 22 other states have passed legislation that address assault or harassment of sports officials.¹² Research indicates that at least ten states have had sports specific assault statutes going back to at least 1998.¹³

The proposed bill provides parity in terms of joining other states in clearly communicating, from a legislative perspective, that assaulting sports officials is not acceptable. Additionally, by including the sports official position within Section 3-203(c), the Maryland Assembly communicates that sports officials provide a unique community service as do the law enforcement officers, emergency personnel, and parole agents specifically listed in the section.

Additionally, from a public health perspective, we always balance the risks of the proposed options in public health interventions. The addition of this language to the statute has little risk by being on the books as each situation of its application will be considered by relevant law enforcement and prosecuting authorities. However, it benefits the public by plainly

¹¹ <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/03/new-surgeon-general-advisory-raises-alarm-about-devastating-impact-epidemic-loneliness-isolation-united-states.html>

¹² <https://www.naso.org/resources/legislation/state-legislation/#:~:text=Whoever%20commits%20aggravated%20assault%20upon,to%20kill%20the%20sports%20official.>

¹³ Chiafullo, C.M. (1998). From personal foul to personal attack: How sports officials are the target of physical abuse from players, coaches, and fans alike. *Seton Hall Journal of Sports Law*, 8, 201-227.

communicating that sports officials are covered under the Maryland second degree criminal assault statute and that there is recourse under the law.

Conclusion

In times where we must constantly consider new risks throughout our daily lives, we should be able to ensure that sports in our communities are one of the last bastions of unadulterated, safe public engagement. This legislation, while not wholly preventative, communicates this expectation to the public and provides assurance to sports officials and the broader community that there are mechanisms for individuals that assault sports officials to be held accountable.

Consequently, I implore you to consider the important role that this legislation will play in protecting the sanctity and safety of sports across Maryland and encourage you to support the adoption of Senate Bill 842.

Thank you again to Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman Waldstreicher, and the members of the Judicial Proceeding Committee for the opportunity to provide written testimony on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Monroe J. Molesky

Monroe J. Molesky, MPH
USSF/MPSSAA Licensed Soccer Referee
Public Health Practitioner and Researcher

Mike Schilpp

From: MIKE ROSS <mike27@comcast.net>
Sent: Tuesday, January 14, 2025 11:44 PM
To: MARYBETH CAROZZA
Subject: Senate Bill 0112

Senator Carozza,

My name is Mike Ross. I am the assigner for three high school sports officiating groups on the Eastern Shore. I represent the Bayside Football Officials, the Atlantic Coast Umpires Association and the Lower Shore Volleyball Officials, a total of 115 officials.

I write to urge you to support the passage of Senate Bill 0112, the proposed law protecting sports officials. Maryland needs to join the 23 states that have similar laws in place and protect our officials from assault and harassment while they provide Maryland students the opportunity to compete in interscholastic sports. It is unfortunate that this is necessary, but every year we see more incidents of our officials being threatened by fans for providing a needed service. This has to stop. I have been officiating high school sports on the Eastern Shore for 44 years and I can attest to the yearly increase in confrontational incidents.

Please pass Senate Bill 0112.

Sincerely,
Mike Ross
443-614-2765

Joel Corona
2109a E Boundary ave
Baltimore, MD 21237
Jcorona29@outlook.com
443-560-4214

January 1, 2025

Dear Senator Dulany-James,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 0112, which is aimed at providing greater protections for sports officials in Maryland. I am a 21-year-old umpire working out of Baltimore County. Officiating has helped me pay for college and as an active member of the officiating community, I am deeply concerned about the rising incidents of violence and harassment directed at officials during sports events, and I believe that this legislation is critical in ensuring the safety and well-being of all those involved.

There are over 37,000 sports officials in Maryland who currently have no legal protection against violence while performing their duties. The lack of protection puts not only the officials at risk but also undermines the integrity of sports events and disrupts the fair and respectful environment that athletes and coaches rely on. Senate Bill 0112 offers a much-needed safeguard, ensuring that those who dedicate their time to officiating can do so without fear of physical harm or personal danger.

I respectfully urge you to lend your support to this bill. As an advocate for the safety of all Marylanders, your backing would be instrumental in ensuring that sports officials receive the respect and protection they deserve. This legislation is crucial for the future of sports officiating in our state, and I believe it will have a profound positive impact on the community.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am hopeful that you will support Senate Bill 0112 and help create a safer environment for Maryland's sports officials. Should you have any questions or need further information, I would be happy to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,
Joel Corona
BBUA Umpire

Mike Schilpp

From: Stuart Wexler <stuart.wexler@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 4, 2025 10:58 AM
To: will.smith@senate.state.md.us
Subject: Maryland Senate Bill 0112 - Let's Protect Officials!

Senator Smith,

I am a youth basketball official in the State of Maryland. In fact, this is my first year being an official. After watching my son play middle school basketball for three years in Frederick, I became acutely aware of the shortage of officials in Maryland. I felt I had something to offer the profession, and I've always been a believer in "if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem", so I gained my state certification last November and have been officiating all season.

Unfortunately, one of the things I also became acutely aware of while watching my son play basketball, and attending other youth sports in this state, is the abuse - often verbal, occasionally physical - that youth sports officials endure while trying to officiate events. In fact, the very first organized youth basketball game my son ever played in was a small AAU tournament in Maryland where another game was interrupted because a coach and parents attacked the officials and one player on the opposing team. Police were called and responded to the scene, but the only thing that happened was the coach was ejected from the facility; the parents had left before the police even arrived.

This abuse factored into my decision on whether to become an official. I'm an Army veteran and a current member of the law enforcement community, so I felt I was equipped to handle the situation. Many others are not and, as a result, choose not to join our profession. As a result, the number of youth sports officials in this state is decreasing all the time, threatening event cancellations. This hurts nobody more than our kids, who rely on youth sports for exercise, entertainment, social interaction, and the development of important life skills. Youth sports has been and continues to be an important outlet and tool for our kids - boys and girls - to develop into mature and conscientious adults. The fewer opportunities they have to compete on the athletic field, the more damage is done to them now and as future citizens of Maryland.

I was somewhat surprised to learn that there are no current laws in the State of Maryland that protect sports officials as a unique class. Twenty-seven other states have such protections in place. We have a unique, well- and easily-defined role, and face threatening behavior that is directly tied to that role. We would not face those threats but for our role as sports officials. Additionally, a sports official is in a particularly vulnerable position while working an event. Our eyes and ears are focused on the players and the coaches, ensuring a fair and safe competition. We are not always able to pay attention to people or events occurring outside the boundaries of our event. This makes us especially vulnerable. Further, as we all have seen, there has been a stark increase in abusive parent and fan behavior toward officials over the last several years. Game environments have become more heated and create a supercharged environment primed for bad actors. As a result, officials need added protection. Indeed, I currently work at a venue in northern Maryland where, due to past fan interactions with officials, we receive a security escort to our vehicles after games. This surely highlights that there is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Finally, I would like to point out that violence against officials is violence against children. If a parent comes out onto the floor to attack an official, they are going to have to make their way through as many as 22 children to reach the official. Those children will then watch as the parent assaults another adult or simply doing their job. Surely this is not the kind of environment we want for our kids, and we should do whatever we can to deter this behaviour.

I think Senate Bill 0112, criminalizing the assault of sports officials, is an important step toward making the game environment safer for officials, fans, and participants. I have been told that you are in a unique position, as Chairman of the Judicial Committee, to see that the Bill makes its way to the Senate floor for a vote. I am not directly one of your constituents - I live in Frederick - but I nevertheless implore you to put the Bill up for a committee vote. Getting this through committee is a critical first step in getting this legislation passed and creating a safer environment for everyone involved in youth sports. That safer environment will, in turn, allow more adults to feel comfortable joining the ranks of officials in this state, ensuring that athletic opportunities for all our kids continue well into the future.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Stuart Wexler
IAABO Board 214