

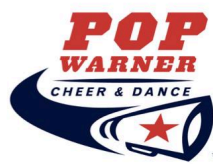
HB 1393
Written Testimony
Steve Strawbridge, President & CEO
Pop Warner Little Scholars

*Maryland House Ways & Means Committee
Submitted February 27, 2025*

As the nation's most recognized name in youth football, Pop Warner Little Scholars has served young people since 1929 through a focus on sports and scholastic achievement. As such, we appreciate the opportunity to offer our perspective on HB 1393, which seeks to establish key requirements for youth sports programs, including maintaining a personnel registry, ensuring parental acknowledgment, and posting return-to-play policies online.

Pop Warner has long mandated a number of the actions you are considering in your proposed legislation as part of our holistic approach to athlete safety and well-being.

We have been recognized for implementing the sport's most forward-thinking safety measures, including limiting contact in football practices to 25% of practice time, eliminating kickoffs and the three-point stance for our youngest age divisions, banning full-speed, head-on tackling and blocking drills, and mandating that any player who suffers a suspected head injury receive medical clearance before returning to play.



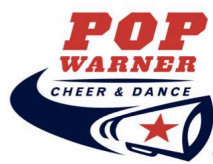
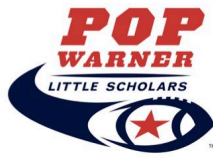
To ensure our policies and protocols are guided by an evidence-based approach, Pop Warner relies on advice from our independent Medical Advisory Committee, which consists of neurosurgeons, sports medicine professionals, pediatricians, and researchers who provide oversight based on medical science and professional expertise.

Pop Warner provides extensive educational resources for athletes, parents, and coaches on a variety of topics including concussion awareness, hydration, injury prevention, training techniques, risk management, and proper equipment usage. By prioritizing safety, we create an environment where young athletes can thrive.

Specific to this legislation, Pop Warner already mandates provisions found in HB 1393. Our parent/athlete contract, which must be signed at registration and before an athlete takes the field, includes provisions that align with the proposed requirements, specifically regarding return-to-play policies following head injuries. The Official Pop Warner Rule Book states the following:

S1: CONCUSSION RETURN TO PLAY GUIDELINES:

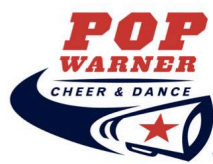
An athlete who is suspected of sustaining a concussion or a head injury in a practice, game or competition shall be removed from practice, play or competition at that time based on evaluation and determination by the



Head Coach. However, if an official licensed athletic trainer or other official qualified medical professional is on site and available to render such evaluation, that person shall always have final authority as to removal or return to play/ competition of the athlete. When an official licensed athletic trainer or other official qualified medical professional is not present, and a parent or guardian of the injured athlete is serving as head coach, the final authority on removal of a athlete shall rest with the league president, association president or the top ranking assistant head coach; whomever is present and highest in the Pop Warner chain of command.

Any Pop Warner athlete who has been removed from practice, play or competition due to a head injury or suspected concussion may not return to Pop Warner activities until the athlete has been evaluated by a currently licensed medical professional trained in the evaluation and management of concussions and receives written clearance to return to play from that licensed practitioner.

In the absence of an official licensed athletic trainer or other official qualified medical professional, at Pop Warner regional events, the Regional Director and/or Regional Cheer & Dance Coordinator shall be the final authority on removal of an athlete for a suspected head injury or concussion. At National events, the National Football Commissioner or National Cheer & Dance Commissioner, or in their absence the Executive

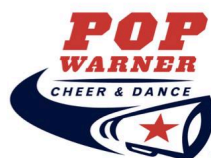


Director, shall be the final authority on removal of an athlete for a suspected head injury or concussion.

Pop Warner recommends that all decisions be made in the best interest of the athlete and that when any doubt exists as to the health of the athletes, they sit out. Please check www.popwarner.com or www.cdc.gov/concussion for Center for Disease Control (CDC) signs and symptoms chart for concussions.

It should be noted that this policy applies to any activity – including practice – but for games it is the responsibility of the home team to provide “medical coverage at each game or competition. In the absence of a physician and or ambulance on the site, the minimum safety requirement will be the presence of one individual associated with the home team/host organization who is currently EMT qualified or is currently certified in Red Cross Community First Aid and Safety, the P.R.E.P.A.R.E. Course by the National Center for Sport Safety (www.sportssafety.org), or their equivalent.”

In addition to procedures aimed at safer play, all Pop Warner programs **are required** to annually conduct a background check of Coaches, Board of Directors members and any other persons, volunteers or hired workers, who provide regular service to the league and/or have repetitive access to, or contact with, players and/or spirit participants. The purpose of these



background checks is, first and foremost, to protect the children. The Administrative Manual spells out the requirement clearly:

All Coaches, Board of Directors' members and any other persons or volunteer workers who have repetitive access to or contact with youth participants must undergo a background check. Each League shall require and be responsible for enforcing all league and association personnel to annually submit a fully completed official "Pop Warner Volunteer Application." No League shall permit any person to participate in any manner, whose background check reveals a conviction for, or guilty plea to, any crime involving or against a minor. Each League shall also require and be responsible for enforcing that an Officer of each member Association complete and submit an official Pop Warner "Association Confirmation of Compliance with Background Checks" affidavit to the League for the League to retain. Then, each League is required to file an official Pop Warner "League Confirmation of Compliance with Background Checks" affidavit annually with the National Office.

When a family enrolls their child in one of our programs we believe they should feel confidence that we are doing everything possible to create a safer, trusted environment to play the sport they love. We take that responsibility seriously, and we appreciate the opportunity to offer our experienced view on these measures. Thank you.