

Good afternoon,

Chair Atterberry, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways and Means Committee. My name is Neal Downing. I have been an educator since 1996, a youth sports advocate, and an Athletic Director for the past 17 years. I am also the proud father of three Division 1 college student-athletes. Today, I am here to speak in strong support of House Bill 935, which mandates venue-specific emergency action plans for high school football games, including the presence of either an athletic trainer or an ambulance/EMT at every game.

This bill is not just about policy—it's about saving lives. As someone who had the privilege of playing college football, I understand the risks that come with this sport. But I also carry with me the memory of my best friend, Mario Roberts, who suffered a severe neck injury during a high school game. There was no athletic trainer or ambulance on site that day. While a call was made to 9-1-1, precious time was lost in getting him the critical medical attention he needed. That delay could have cost him his life. No student-athlete, coach, or family should ever have to endure that kind of trauma.

Football is a physically demanding sport, and injuries—both minor and catastrophic—are an inherent risk. Having trained medical professionals or emergency services on site is not an extravagance; it is a necessity. Immediate medical response can mean the difference between a full recovery and a life-altering injury—or worse. This bill ensures that every high school football game in Maryland is equipped to handle emergencies swiftly and effectively, protecting our student-athletes and giving parents peace of mind.

Furthermore, this bill sets a standard of care that reflects our values as a community. We invest in our students' academic success, but we must also invest in their safety. By passing this bill, we send a clear message that the well-being of our young athletes is a priority. It's a small price to pay to ensure that no family has to experience what Mario's family went through.

For these reasons, I urge you to give House Bill 935 a favorable report. Let's take this critical step to protect our student-athletes and ensure that every game is as safe as possible. Thank you for your time and consideration.