



Maryland Soccer Foundation

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March 6, 2026

Maryland House of Delegates
The Honorable Debra Davis, Chair
Judiciary Committee
100 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Favorable Support – HB 1053 - Criminal Law - Second Degree Assault - Sports Official

Chairwoman Davis and Members of the Committee,

My name is Matt Libber, and I am the Executive Director of the Maryland SoccerPlex. On behalf of the Maryland SoccerPlex and the Soccer Association of Montgomery, we respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of House Bill 1053.

The Maryland SoccerPlex, located in Boyds, Maryland, is one of the largest youth and amateur soccer facilities in the region. The complex includes multiple outdoor and indoor fields and hosts hundreds of thousands of players, families, and spectators each year. We also operate the Soccer Association of Montgomery, we support a wide range of youth and adult soccer programs serving players from across Montgomery County, Maryland and the surrounding region. These programs rely on thousands of games each year being officiated by trained referees who ensure fair play and player safety.

However, like many sports organizations across Maryland and the nation, we are experiencing a growing shortage of sports officials. One of the most frequently cited reasons referees leave officiating is the increasing level of abuse they experience from players, parents, and coaches. What should be a positive environment for youth athletics too often becomes hostile for the officials responsible for enforcing the rules and maintaining safety on the field.

Referees regularly report verbal harassment and intimidation from the sidelines. In more troubling situations, officials have been threatened or physically confronted during and following games. While these incidents do not represent the behavior of most participants or spectators, even a small number of serious incidents have a significant impact on referee retention.

The loss of officials has real consequences. Without referees, games cannot take place. Leagues are forced to cancel matches, reduce schedules, or assign inexperienced officials to high-level games. This creates additional stress on the remaining referees and further accelerates the loss of experienced officials.



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In situations where a sports official is assaulted, many referees choose not to pursue charges. Officials are often working part-time or volunteering their time, and pursuing charges can require sports officials to go to a courthouse to file charges. The time and administrative burden associated with this process discourages many officials from moving forward, even when serious misconduct occurs. This bill would allow law enforcement to make a probable cause arrest on site of the assault which would increase follow through from officials as well as serve as a deterrent for future bad behavior from parents and spectators.

House Bill 1053 sends an important message that assaults against sports officials will not be tolerated in Maryland. By recognizing sports officials in statute and making it easier for law enforcement to address these incidents, the bill helps provide a stronger deterrent to violent behavior and offers meaningful protection for those who make youth sports possible.

At the Maryland SoccerPlex and the Soccer Association of Montgomery, we are committed to creating a positive and safe environment for players, families, coaches, and officials. Ensuring that referees feel protected and supported is essential to maintaining youth sports programs across our communities.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to issue a **favorable report on House Bill 1053**.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Matthew Libber

Executive Director

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