



Date: March 2, 2026

Hearing Date: March 4, 2026

Committee: House Ways and Means Committee

Bill: HB 961 - Public Schools and Youth Sports Programs - Concussion Protocol - Alterations

Position: In Favor

Submitted by:

Devashree Mahajan & Ruth Carlock

Brain Injury Association of Maryland

2200 Kernan Dr.

Baltimore MD 21207

Our organization:

The Brain Injury Association of Maryland (BIAMD) is a 43-year-old nonprofit dedicated to education, advocacy, and research related to brain injury. Each year, we support thousands of individuals and families through our Information & Assistance Helpline, provide specialized services to more than 100 participants through Maryland's Brain Injury Waiver Program, and convene professionals, survivors, and caregivers through our annual educational conference and community events. We also advocate for policies that strengthen prevention, improve access to services, and enhance quality of life for Marylanders living with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and acquired brain injury (ABI). BIAMD writes in strong SUPPORT of this bill.

Rationale:

The current law on concussions in Maryland, which is under Education Law §11, Section 7-433, does not specifically list athletic officials, such as referees, who should be able to



remove a player from the game when a concussion is suspected. However, the proposed law, HB 961, adds athletic officials and referees to the list of those who should be able to remove a player from the game. This provides a neutral individual who should be able to remove the athlete from the game. It should be noted that the perspective of a referee and an athletic trainer might be different from each other.

This is consistent with the way professional sports are handled. It is also consistent with federal recommendations. Expanding the pool of trained adults who can recognize potential concussions relieves some of the stress on coaches and parents who may not recognize the signs of a concussion in the heat of the moment, particularly if athletic trainers are responsible for multiple games at once, depending on the district and the sport. Overall, HB 961 brings Maryland law into the modern era and makes it consistent with national best practices, including the CDC's HEADS UP program, which emphasizes the role of safety enforcement by officials: "Recognize concussion signs and symptoms and stop play if a concussion is suspected."

Other states have already implemented such measures to increase the safety of student-athletes. For instance, Oklahoma's concussion law requires coaches and officials to undergo concussion training and allows the removal of a student-athlete from play if a concussion is suspected. In youth sports organizations, team or game officials may be assessed penalties if a student-athlete is not removed from play if a concussion is suspected. Ohio requires concussion training for coaches and officials and authorizes officials to remove a student-athlete from play if signs or symptoms of a head or brain injury are suspected. Minnesota requires coaches and officials to remove a student-athlete from play if a concussion is suspected.

HB 961 will aid in mitigating the long-term effects of concussions on young athletes. Adolescents are considered a vulnerable group that is prone to suffering from concussions, especially if they are actively engaged in sporting activities. The long-term consequences of suffering from a concussion can be severe, as they affect mental well-being, cognitive abilities, and the general well-being of the individual. The situation is worse if the individual continues playing their sport after suffering a concussion, as this increases the chances of further injuries.

HB 961 is a step forward for the state of Maryland as it continues to promote harm reduction, prevention of brain injuries, and concussion safety. We respectfully ask that you issue a favorable report on this legislation.



References: (make into proper citations)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). *A FACT SHEET FOR sports officials*.

https://www.cdc.gov/heads-up/media/pdfs/highschoolsports/HighSchool_Sports_Officials-a.pdf

Office of the revisor of statutes. Sec. 121A.37 MN Statutes. (n.d.).

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/121a.37>

“Recognize and remove” is key to detecting, managing concussions among youth, say new guidelines for parents and coaches. (2026, January 12). Buffalo.edu. Retrieved March 2, 2026, from <https://www.buffalo.edu/news/releases/2026/01/Concussion-guidelines-parents-coaches.html>

Schools & sports organizations. (n.d.). Health Department. <https://oklahoma.gov/health/health-education/injury-prevention-service/concussions/schools-and-sports-organizations.html>

Youth concussions. (n.d.). <https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/child-injury-prevention/youthconcussions/>