

March 2, 2011

The Honorable Sheila Hixson
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building, Room 131
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Peter Hammen
Chair, House Health & Government Operations Committee
House Office Building, Room 241
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Hixson and Chair Hammen:

I am writing in support of **HB 858 – Education – Student Athletes – Concussions**. We commend this effort to educate coaches, physicians, parents and players regarding the public health impact of Pediatric and Adolescent concussion.

Concussion has long been recognized as a public health concern, with millions of children seeking medical care yearly for mild traumatic brain injury. It has only been relatively recently that concussion prevention and recognition has been emphasized in youth sports, however.¹ The brain is an unpaired, crucially important structure, and as such should be protected to the best of the parent's and athlete's ability. Moreover, the young brain has a number of characteristics that may make children particularly susceptible to the complications of concussion. Therefore, children and adolescent athletes deserve special attention to ensure that prevention and treatment are offered at all levels of play. Complications of concussion include neurocognitive and neuropsychiatric difficulties that can have long reaching implications for our children and adolescent athletes. Brain protection methods, such as appropriate use of mouth guards, helmets and player education are of great importance in the prevention of concussion, and the cascade of neurologic complications that may occur.

Multiple concussions are not good for the developing brain, and this initiative should help reduce the frequency of concussion, and facilitate safe and staged return to play. Especially important is the prevention of so-called "second impact" syndrome, a condition resulting from the inappropriate return to play of a player who has sustained a concussion, and then suffers another concussion, with catastrophic, life threatening effects. Importantly, protecting the brain integrity of young athletes is critical, as they represent the future of our society.

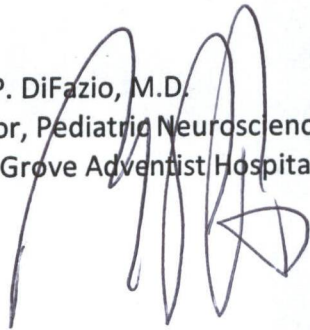
Finally, an important point must be made. Although concussion remains a risk in youth sports, it remains crucial to emphasize the need for our children to exercise. Cardiovascular fitness is key in reducing the frequency and severity of a number of preventable diseases, including

diabetes, heart disease, Alzheimer and stroke. Balance must be struck between reducing the risk of concussion and encouraging participation in sports that provide a safe, encouraging environment to build relationships, and appropriate exercise practices.

Once again, we wholly agree with the implementation of the proposed bill, and will work to support the children of Maryland with comprehensive and expert concussion care. Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information or clarifications.

Sincerely,

Marc P. DiFazio, M.D.
Director, Pediatric Neurosciences
Shady Grove Adventist Hospital



1. Alla S, Sullivan J, McCrory P, et al. Spreading the word on sports concussion: Citation Analysis of Summary and Agreement, Position and Consensus Statements on Sports Concussion. Br J Sports Med 2011 Feb;45(2):132-5.