

Return to Play

Problem: In Texas, children playing in non-school sponsored youth sports do not have the benefit of concussion Return-to Play (RTP) protocols. RTP protocols are designed to ensure a child who appears to have suffered a concussion is assessed, removed from play and obtains clearance before returning to play. RTP protocols exist in Texas schools but are absent in all other organized youth sports arenas.

Risk: If a young player in a non-school sport's league suffers a concussion and that player is allowed to remain in a game or practice without first healing from the concussion, that young athlete is at significant risk for catastrophic brain injury and permanent cognitive impairment.

Solution: Require non-school based youth athletic teams to have mandatory concussion Return-to Play protocols.

Analysis: Texas has some of the most accomplished young athletes in the nation. Of the nearly 8.3 million children under the age of 18 in Texas, many play in recreational, club, and other sports leagues that are not school affiliated.

Regardless of the inherent risk for concussion, young Texans will play football, and other contact sports. At the same time, concern about young people playing full contact sports is growing. Over the past decade, participation in high school football in Texas is down by 12%.¹ This decline is largely due to the risk of brain injury to the young players.

Kari Leong, a mother of a young football player, and an educator from Abilene said, "I love football. I watch the NFL. We go to the games. Believe me, I'm all-in on football. But there is a part of me --- I pray over every game, 'Please keep these boys safe'. We're all more educated now." She continued, "It's a concern because I'm very concerned about CTE."¹

Requiring concussion RTP protocols in all youth sports throughout the entire state is the best way to protect the tens of thousands of children who play in non-school sport's leagues. If one child is worth protecting in a school-based league, then all children are worth protecting regardless of where they play. RTP protocols ensure all non-school youth sports organizations across our state place our children and their lifelong potential first.

Pop Warner Football already requires that a mandatory Return to Play protocol be followed when a concussion is suspected. As a result, Pop Warner Football is a natural ally in this effort.

Conclusion: Expanding the RTP laws in Texas to include non-school youth sports is a good idea whose time has come. Concussion RTP protocols are considered best practices in Texas (Pop Warner / Texas Public Schools) and kids in Texas playing in non-school sports leagues should be given the same level of protection from serious brain injury.



¹ Shenie, David. (2023, December 18). The Divided States of Football: In football's epicenter, a shifting landscape. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2023/12/18/texas-football-participation-decline/>

Draft Legislation

By: _____

____.B. No. ____

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to concussions or other brain injuries and information training for coaches and youth athletics personnel.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Subtitle B, Title 13, Occupations Code, is amended by adding Chapter 2053 to read as follows:

CHAPTER 2053. COACHES AND ATHLETICS PERSONNEL

Sec. 2053.001. DEFINITIONS^[LG1] . In this chapter:

(1) "Association" means an organization that administers or conducts non-school youth athletics activities and that is a nonprofit corporation established under Chapter 22, Business Organization Code, or is a nonprofit corporation or an association that is exempt from taxation under Chapter 151, Tax Code.

(2) "Athletics personnel" means athletic directors and other persons actively involved in organizing, training, or coaching sports activities for youth.

(3) "Coach" means any individual who volunteers or is paid, who an association has approved to organize, train, or supervise a youth athlete or team of youth athletes.

(5) "Youth athlete" means an individual younger than 18 years of age that participates in an organized sport of an association.

Sec. 2053.002. TRAINING POLICY; YOUTH CONCUSSIONS AND OTHER BRAIN INJURY INFORMATION COURSE. (a) A youth athletics association that sponsors or conducts sports training or youth athletic activities for youth athletes shall require the association's coaches and athletics personnel to complete, if available at no cost, training courses that provide for not less than two hours of training in the subject matter of concussions, including evaluation, prevention, symptoms, risks, and long-term effects. The course may be online or in person and must be approved by the Department of State Health Services Advisory Board or a course approved by the University Interscholastic League.

(b) A person required to take the training course described by subsection (a) must take the training course from an authorized training provider at least once every two years.

(c) Each person described by Subsection (a) must submit proof of timely completion of an approved course in compliance with subsection (b) to the association that conducts a youth athletic activity or event and the association shall maintain a record of the individual's course completion during the period the person serves as a coach or member of the athletics personnel for that association.

Sec. 2053.003. RETURN TO PLAY IN PRACTICE OR COMPETITION. (a) A coach may not allow a youth athlete to participate in any athletic event, training, or practice on the same day that the youth athlete

(1) exhibits signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion following an observed or suspected blow to the head or body; or

(2) has been diagnosed with a concussion.

(b) A coach may allow a youth athlete who is prohibited from participating in an athletic event or training as described by subsection (a) to participate in an athletic event, training or practice no sooner than the day after the youth athlete experienced a blow to the head or body and only after the youth athlete has provided the coach with a medical release from a physician or licensed healthcare professional.

Sec. 2053.004. REQUIRED ANNUAL FORM ACKNOWLEDGING CONCUSSION INFORMATION. For each year of participation, and prior to a person under 18 years of age participates as a youth athlete with an association, the youth athlete over the age of 12 or older, and the youth athlete's parent or guardian or another person with legal authority to make medical decisions for the youth athlete, must have signed a form for that year that acknowledges receiving and reading information that explains concussion prevention, symptoms, treatment and oversight and that includes guidelines for safely resuming participation in an athletic activity following a concussion.

Sec. 2053.005. IMMUNITY FROM LIABILITY. A coach or member of the athletics personnel of an association that has complied with the provisions of this Chapter is immune from civil or criminal liability related to a head injury sustained by a youth athlete as a result of participation in a youth athletic event or activity of an association, unless the coach or member of the athletics personnel of an association acted or failed to act because of gross negligence or willful misconduct.

SECTION 2. This Act takes effect September 1, 2025.