

Written testimony provided to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Children and Youth Committee by Stephen D. Keener, President and Chief Executive Officer of Little League Baseball, Incorporated – Williamsport, Pennsylvania

I am grateful to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Children and Youth Committee, and Committee Chairwoman, State Representative Louise Bishop, for giving me the opportunity to offer my testimony on behalf of more than 160,000 Little Leaguers who play baseball and softball in the Commonwealth each year.

I also want to thank State Representative Mike Carroll, not only for his volunteer service to his community as a Little League coach, but for his desire to make the games of baseball and softball safer for children. Volunteers like him are the core strength of our program, and we value their input in helping us keep a watchful eye on every aspect of Little League Baseball and Softball.

Even so, we strongly oppose the legislation proposed by Representative Carroll. We believe that passing such a law would not reduce injuries in baseball and softball. Instead, in our judgment, it is more likely to result in fewer children participating not only in Little League, but in other youth baseball and softball programs, and high school programs as well.

Led by more than 50,000 adult volunteers, Pennsylvania is not only one of the largest states in Little League, it is the birthplace of our program. Nearly 70 years ago in Williamsport, three Little League teams played the first season of what would become the world's largest, and most respected, organized youth sports program. Today, our International Headquarters in Williamsport is the administrative center for more than 2.6 million children around the world, along with a corps of more than 1 million adult volunteers.

Our volunteers know that safety has been, and always will be, the hallmark of Little League Baseball and Softball. They know that if this was an issue of safety, Little League would again take the lead in finding a way to reduce injuries.

In fact, over the past seven decades, innovations in the name of safety have become commonplace in Little League. The modern batting helmet, the catcher's helmet, the modern chest protector and many other safety-related aspects of baseball and softball began with Little League's active participation in their development.

Our injury statistics prove that Little League's attention to safety is second to none. Less than one percent of Little Leaguers are injured in any given year, yet we remain relentless in our efforts to make the game safer, while keeping it relevant and appealing to today's children.

Today and in the coming weeks, the Children and Youth Committee considers whether non-wood bats are safe enough for the youth baseball and softball players in Pennsylvania.

I am here to let you know that Little League, because of its historic and watchful attention to the safety of the sports of baseball and softball, has already done that. In fact, we addressed this issue all the way back in the early 1990s.

I wanted to share with you some of the facts involved, and how Little League has taken a distinctly pro-active approach to the non-wood bat issue.

- Since 1993, bat manufacturers have only been producing non-wood bats for play in Little League that do not exceed a “Bat Performance Factor” of 1.15. The BPF is essentially a measure of a non-wood bat’s performance (how fast the ball exits the bat when hit) in relation to a standard wood bat’s rating of 1.00. A very good wood bat’s BPF is 1.15.
- That means today’s best non-wood bats (usually made of aluminum) used in Little League perform statistically the same, in terms of how fast the ball exits the best wood bats.
- Little League reached this agreement with the bat manufacturers of non-wood bats in the early 1990s because it noticed the number of reported injuries to pitchers requiring medical attention after being hit by batted balls had increased to about 145 in a year. (Even at that number, when you consider that there are about 4 million Little League games and practices each year, the number is still very small.)
- Since the BPF mandate, along with Little League’s requirement standardizing the liveliness and hardness of baseballs used, these types of reported injuries have decreased to their current level of 20-30 per year. Certainly, nobody wants to see any child injured, but consider that number in relation to the 4 million games and practices each year.
- In 2001, Little League International remained vigilant about reducing injuries, and cooperated in a thorough review of non-wood bats by the U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. At the conclusion of the review, the CPSC determined there was insufficient evidence to support a ban of non-wood bats from the marketplace.
- Injury data has been kept on record at Little League International since the early 1960s. Since that time, there have been eight fatalities in the Little League program as a result of a batted ball. Six of those fatalities have come from wood bats and two from non-wood bats, in 1971 and 1973. Those occurred 20 years before the mandated Bat Performance Standard that is in place today.
- Little League receives royalties on the sales of both wood and non-wood bats, totaling around \$360,000 annually. It is estimated that a wood bat mandate would cause royalty payments to Little League to at least equal current levels, but more

likely increase because of the increased number of bats purchased. As such, I want to make it clear that this is not a financial issue for Little League International. This is about our goal to keep as many children playing as possible.

- Some people prefer wood bats because they are more traditionally associated with baseball. Players in local Little Leagues have always been able to use wood bats if they wish. Little League International supports the right of a league or individual to choose to use either wood or BPF certified non-wood bats.

Ultimately, because there is no data or evidence to support the banning of non-wood bats as a safety issue, it is one of choice. It is true that non-wood bats are lighter than wood bats, and are thus easier for younger, less-skilled players to swing. It means these players are able to have more success while batting, by being able to hit the ball more often. That, in turn, increases the involvement of other players in the game. But because of Little League's historic penchant for safety, using non-wood bats does not mean those players are less safe.

Even though Little League Baseball and Softball are among the safest athletic activities in which a child can participate, we would like to be able to prevent ALL injuries in our program.

Ultimately, we believe that a legislative ban on non-wood bats in Little League will not make it safer for youth baseball and softball players in Pennsylvania. Instead, it will likely only serve to decrease participation in these great sports, and potentially drive these children into less healthy pursuits.

Thank you again for this opportunity.

Stephen D. Keener
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Little League Baseball, Incorporated