

Good Morning Chairman Conklin and members of the House Commerce Committee.

Thank you very much for this opportunity and thank you to my State Representative Scott Conklin to come before you and speak on House Bill 1983. Having attended Parkland High School it is very comforting to be sitting before a committee member and teacher from the Lehigh Valley. My goal today is to share with you my thoughts and the thoughts of various individuals who I've spoken to over the last months and weeks. I am a sixth grade teacher in the State College Area School District teaching a subject called academic literacy which focuses exclusively on nonfiction reading.

One of the reasons that I agreed to come to this hearing today and speak to all of you is because of the fact that athletics specifically basketball has been a huge part of my family and was a huge part of my upbringing. My late grandfather Dick Schmidt was the first basketball coach at Dieruff High School in the Allentown School District. The success of athletic programs in my estimation is directly connected to successful students along with positivity in a community. To this day when I return to the Allentown area from State College, I constantly encounter people that say to me when the athletic programs of the Allentown School District were successful, the community had a positive outlook and resonated with the success of everyone. In the 1970s when the cities sports teams were thriving; legislative action changed from a separate private and public PIAA structure to a combined championship format.

The educational world was vastly different then. Primarily there was nothing that was called a charter school. There was nothing that was called a cyber charter school. Also there was not a fair funding report. Name, image and license didn't exist either. As I prepared this testimony today, I thought through how charter schools changed education, cyber schools and cyber charter schools have impacted every entity along with NIL. This commonwealth puts out over \$2 billion from public schools to charter schools every year. Public schools can't offer students from outside their boundary lines tuition assistance to come to the boundary school. Private school and charter schools can attract students to attend and the public schools have to submit payments to the charter schools for those students to come. In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania 82% of the funding for cyber and charter schools comes from the public school. This creates a disadvantage for the public schools and it's extremely obvious that the more money the public schools are paying out the less they have to fund their athletic programs. The less money that public schools have even if they were permitted to subsidize students outside the boundary lines for their tuition costs, the less resources are available for their athletic programs to attract students. How can this not lead to economic disadvantages.

I think that while I inherently feel that a system should be created where the public schools have their state championships and their champions and the private schools have their state

championships, I wanted to present data. In the research that I did looking back at the 2023 results of football I found that out of the 2023 PIAA State Championships three public schools, two private schools, and one charter school won the 2023 football state championships in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

I furthered looked at the women's basketball PIAA state championships in 2023. Five private schools won the PIAA state championships in 2023 women's basketball and only one public school. In boys basketball two private schools, two public and two charter schools won the PIAA state championships in 2023. I went to look at who won state championships in other sports. In softball six public schools and no private schools won the PIAA state championships. In baseball one private school and five public schools won the 2023 PIAA state championships.

When I looked at this data, I thought to myself what are the trends I see and what's the message that I could assist in communicating to all of you on the house education committee about this data. What I came to find out is it seems to me as if basketball and football are having a greater impact on non-boundary schools winning their state titles than when I looked at baseball and softball. It seems to me like there's less of a disparity in those sports.

When talking with a PIAA official, he made the point of looking at smaller school districts. Now they're competing with private schools and now they're competing with charter schools for the same athletes. Even when examining 6A schools throughout the state, the Allentown School District puts out over 60 million dollars a year for charter school payments. This directly impacts their ability to upgrade and improve athletic facilities and be competitive.

Fortunately the economic burden of vouchers on boundary schools has not come to fruition, but NIL and recruiting has given non-boundary schools an advantage. Consider this scenario of a non-boundary school waiving tuition to attend their school and offer incentives from a capital campaign or endowment. Boundary schools do not possess the ability to waive tuition or stockpile an endowment to incentivize athletes to attend their schools. Look at the documented violations at Bishop McCort.

In a story shared with me by a senior wrestler in Centre County, he stated the Iron Man Tournament is unattainable due to the 2A school not being able to fund wrestlers to attend. This brings into focus the financial advantage non-boundary school have at their disposal. Besides different accountability standards for non-boundary schools, this exemplifies the inequities financially where non-boundary schools have more freedoms in raising and securing money without the state mandates which govern boundary schools. Furthermore non-boundary school athletics in rural Centre County influence boundary school athletes as they participate in boundary school athletic

programs while many in urban areas are able to field their own athletic programs.

Besides the financial impact on boundary schools that non-boundary schools are having, boundary schools are required to have a strategic plan that is filed with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and updated every few years. In State College one of the goals that we have in our middle school is for students to participate in activities outside of the academic school day. Currently many students in the middle school are involved in travel teams and club teams. These carry a very significant financial cost in order to participate. I know this every day when I have another student coming up to me to ask me for money for a fundraiser. They are doing this to fund these club and travel sports. My understanding is that PIAA sports was created for students in a boundary school to have the opportunity to participate in athletics. When a student takes up a sport obviously the goal that they have is to try to reach their full potential. I feel that by having a separate playoff structures, it would allow students more opportunity to try to achieve that success.

Governor Shapiro and this state legislature have focused heavily on mental health by us grants and funding to address mental health. In talking with my guidance staff and talking with mental health experts in my middle school building all of them have reiterated this point: sports has a positive impact in reducing stress, assisting with building relationships, as well as understanding a core goal to success in the future is working with others and as a team.

Members of this committee, it doesn't always take money in a yearly budget to improve someone's mental health, simply by giving them the ability to participate in PIAA athletics on a fair playing field has benefits. You have proactively supported mental health and supporting House Bill 1983 gives students a higher percentage of reaching their full potential in this state by having them continually staying involved in athletics in a fair manner.

Just a month ago, I watched on PCN my Alma mater the Parkland Trojans compete against Central York in the PIAA 6A boys basketball championship. Then I watched non-boundary schools compete earlier in the state tournament. There was no comparison in the attendance that was at the Central York versus Parkland high school Basketball game.

As I said at the beginning of my statement, throughout my upbringing in the Lehigh Valley, PIAA sports brought together a community. It may not solve all the problems in this state, but why would you not want to give more success and opportunities and see the impact it has on people. I challenge you to what you can do to help this Commonwealth. This would reinvigorate every public school to be thinking that I'm playing only public schools in the state tournament and all of us are within the same boundaries and the parameters for the athletes we have on our teams are the same.

I ask the House Commerce Committee to please have House Bill 1983 come up for a committee vote and if passed out of committee get on the house calendar for a vote. Level the playing field for public schools and fund all school districts adequately as stated in the fair funding court decision and through the commission's recent report.

I want to close with this. In life, some things can be controlled and the others are not controllable initially. Take control of the unbalanced financial impact on public schools and give public school athletes a separate playoff system. May this be a step in balancing the economic playing field. Thank you so much for your time and I look forward to answering any of your questions.

Respectfully submitted by Rich Schmidt