

Good morning Representative Conklin and members of the House Commerce Committee. It is my distinct pleasure to come and meet with you today regarding House Bill 1983. To give you a little background information on myself I am a 1989 graduate of the Bald Eagle Area High School and 1993 graduate of Lock Haven University. I have worked for the Bald Eagle Area School District for 30 years as the Home & School Visitor and also as the Athletic Director. It is in the role of Athletic Director that I am here to tell you my thoughts on the boundary vs. non-boundary school debate.

Attending District 6 and PIAA Championship events to watch our BEA students or hosting events in almost all PIAA sponsored sports, I constantly hear people complaining about how unfair the current playoffs are for boundary schools. As you are all well aware that the PA School Code of 1949 was amended in 1972 with Act 219 that mandated that the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association, PIAA, include non-public schools in their organization and playoffs. It is because of this legislation that the PIAA has steadfastly told everyone that they can't change the existing system. Well Act 219 was approved 52 years ago and as we all know things are little different in the world of education in the Commonwealth. I don't know the number of non-boundary schools there were in 1972 but I am pretty sure that number is much higher now and I am pretty sure that the number of boundary schools may actually be less since there have been a lot of consolidation in the 30 years I have been involved in interscholastic athletics. I constantly hear and read about members of both the House and Senate talking about how the Commonwealth needs to look about making changes in our daily lives as adults when they talk about energy sources and taxes because we are now in the 21st Century. Well then I ask why aren't they willing to do the same thing for our interscholastic athletes? For many of those teenagers competing for a PIAA state championship this is just as important!! If I am not mistaken the legislature allows the Public Utilities Commission to set the rates for their entities then why won't they allow the PIAA to set their playoffs without interference?

The membership numbers I found when doing some research for my testimony from the PIAA stated that there were 583 public and 184 non-public members. That means 24% of the membership is made up of non-boundary schools. Also when I added up the team champions in all PIAA sponsored sports for the 2022-2023 school year I found out that out of the 76 team champions 54 were boundary schools and 22 were non-boundary. This might surprise you because it did me. However, when you look at the "big name" sports of football, basketball and wrestling you find that those numbers were 7 for boundary and 13 for non-boundary. This is why you hear or read about this every year between December and March.

So let's look at this from the Commerce side of things. I would hope that if the PIAA member schools along with the Board of Control were allowed to look at things without legislative interference that they could come up with a system that would make it better for everyone. More championship games that would allow more public school involvement would create more revenue, especially at the smaller school level. I say this from hosting games in soccer, football, field hockey, boys & girls volleyball, boys & girls soccer, boys & girls basketball, wrestling, baseball and softball. Class A-AA-AAA

games/matches are your money makers when you have boundary schools involved. Non-boundary schools do not bring fans to events if there is any travel involved. I can say this with 100% confidence. For example in basketball if you reduce the boundary classifications to 4 or 5 levels and add 2 non-boundary you will make more money. Also you will give more student athletes the thrill of competing for a PIAA state title. Adding more opportunities for boundary schools to win at PIAA state titles and if you could add a boundary vs. non-boundary round of games in a sport like basketball, the potential revenue could be interesting. Again if we keep thinking like it is 1972 instead of 2024 we are doing a disservice to our student athletes.

Another Commerce issue to me is the addition of charter schools to PIAA. The boundary schools pay for students to attend these schools. So if you think about it, they are paying for another school to beat their own students. I know for our little Central PA rural school district we are paying over \$1.3 million dollars in cyber school bills. Some of our boundary schools are going against the schools year in and year out, spending thousands of dollars, to only lose and never get a chance to play for a PIAA championship. Also we are basically asking our sports fans to foot the bill for the charter teams as well. We are saying your team has basically no chance of winning a basketball championship but we want you to pay for the non-boundary schools championships. Admission prices keep going up to cover costs but these schools provide hardly any fan support. So basically the taxpayers are getting hit at least twice.

The next issue that I want to address and it is a hot ticket item. Mental health. All we keep hearing about is how our student's mental health is at its lowest point for many reasons but especially the recent Covid epidemic. According to the 2022-2023 PDE Reports online, boundary school enrollment for grades 9-12 was 548,549. Enrollment in non-boundary schools was 71,203. Well I think the argument can be made that the way we are running our playoffs in our big 3 revenue sports is doing a major disservice to our students when 11% of them have a 65% chance of winning a state championship.

Now if I can put aside all of the numbers and facts and talk from the heart. The reason I am here today is because I feel it is time to put my money where my mouth is. I have heard the stories for years that nothing is going to change because the non-boundary schools have the money and lobbyists to sue the PIAA if they change anything from the current system. I hear that the issue is that the legislators are not going to do anything because of the money they get from the folks that support the non-boundary supporters. Well to me that is not good enough. The folks in public education need to step up and tell the legislators that they need to do their job. Like I mentioned before we are talking about 11% of the entire 9-12 grade student population having a 65% chance to win a team state title in football, basketball and wrestling. I think that is wrong. But I also think that we aren't doing enough for the non-boundary school students in the other sports. This is just another example of the current state of affairs in our Commonwealth and our nation. House Bill of 1983 is just asking for the folks that deal with interscholastic athletics on a daily basis, athletic directors, administrators and PIAA employees be allowed to look at the data and make the decisions. This is not a new idea. States all across the country have tried numerous ways to handle the same situations, some have

worked and some have not, but the difference is they are allowed to try. What is wrong with that?

I must also say that I am personally frustrated with my fellow athletic directors, coaches, administrators, business managers and superintendents. We have complained about this for years but not really done anything about it. Sure there have been meetings held and articles written but what have we really done? We need members of PSADA, PSBA, PASA, PSEA, PASBO, PSFCA and any other entity that has an interest to truly step up and let their thoughts be heard. No one person should be allowed to hold such an important topic hostage just because of his personal beliefs. Representative Schweyer has constituents that are not non-boundary graduates and they need to be heard as well. We have time to “stir things up” but it needs to happen now. The student athletes of Pennsylvania need to be treated with respect and not be pawns in a political/legal playing field.

I have brought 3 of our student athletes here today to answer your questions. I think this is a great opportunity for them to see how our government works and gain valuable experience in speaking with folks like yourselves. Olivia Boone is a 12th grade student that has participated in volleyball, basketball and softball. She is going to be attending Bloomsburg University in the Fall. Carson Nagle is a junior who participates in football and baseball. Brayden Dubbs is also a junior that participates in football and baseball.

Again I thank you for this opportunity and with that we will answer any questions you may have.