

CO-SPONSORSHIP MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 9, 2019
TO: Legislative Colleagues
FROM: Rep. Todd Novak, Rep. Don Vruwink, Rep. Lisa Subeck, Sen. Andre Jacque and Sen. Jeff Smith
RE: Co-sponsorship of LRB-4781, relating to harassment of a sports official

DEADLINE: Friday, December 20, 2019. Please respond to this email to co-sponsor.

High school sports officials who umpire and referee games are quitting in large numbers and youth sports programs are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain officials due to unruly and verbally abusive fans.

Youth sports are a training ground to produce future sports officials. Games at the high school level are being cancelled because younger people are not becoming certified officials. There are more umpires and officials over 65 than under 30. To ensure we have enough sports officials, we must stop the harassment of officials. This bill modifies the current harassment statute by increasing the penalty for harassment of a sports official from a forfeiture to a misdemeanor. We are introducing this bill at the request of the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletics Association (WIAA), the National Association of Sports Officials, and the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

Under current law, a person commits harassment and is subject to a Class B forfeiture if the person, with intent to harass or intimidate, strikes, shoves, or kicks another person or if the person engages in a course of conduct or repeatedly commits acts which harass or intimidate another person and which serve no legitimate purpose.

Under this bill, the person is guilty of a Class A misdemeanor if the person commits harassment against a referee, umpire, judge, or person performing similar functions and the harassment is in response to, or intended to influence, an action by the sports official.

Because this bill creates a new crime or revises a penalty for an existing crime, the Joint Review Committee on Criminal Penalties may be requested to prepare a report.