

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Christopher Thomas and I am the head boys basketball coach at St. John Public School and I have recently viewed House Bill 1491 as it pertains to potential ease of transfers for out-of-district athletics. I decided to record my thoughts on how this bill, if passed, can alter the landscape of both sports and academics within this document.

The proposed NDHSAA bill, which seeks to remove time-based consequences for students transferring schools for varsity sports, introduces several issues that could negatively affect the development of student-athletes, the integrity of school sports, the integrity of academics, and the overall structure of local communities. While the intent behind this bill may be to provide greater flexibility for students, its implications could lead to unintended consequences that disrupt both the educational and extracurricular landscape.

First, removing the time-based consequences for out-of-district transfers eliminates the adversity-related problem-solving that is essential for the growth of student-athletes. The challenge of earning a spot on a team—whether through competition for positions or overcoming obstacles within the team dynamic—teaches valuable life lessons such as resilience, teamwork, and the importance of persistence. By allowing students to transfer freely, this bill removes an important part of the growth process, potentially leaving students less prepared for the challenges they may face in their future careers or personal lives.

Another significant issue is the impact on team dynamics. High school sports are meant to foster team chemistry, a crucial element of success in any athletic program. Frequent transfers can disrupt team cohesion, making it difficult for coaches and players to develop trust and coordination. Students on constantly changing teams lose the opportunity to build meaningful relationships, which are central to both athletic and personal development. The inability to develop a stable roster could undermine this purpose of extracurricular sports.

Additionally, this bill could significantly harm community relations tied to local sports teams. Historically, high school sports have served as a communal activity, fostering a sense of pride and unity among students, parents, and local residents. When students can transfer without restrictions, the connection between athletes and the communities they represent becomes diluted. The shift from school-based athletics to more competitive "club" teams could remove the sense of belonging and shared purpose that local sports traditionally have to offer. This change would shift the focus of sports from community spirit and character building to an individualized, non-localized model that puts the activity first and everything else second, including a consistent academic track.

From a financial perspective, this bill could complicate matters for schools. Enrollment numbers fluctuate significantly around sports seasons if this bill passes, and with students transferring freely, schools may struggle to predict and manage their finances. This constant shifting of populations could affect the per-student funding that schools receive, as well as lead to budgetary inconsistencies in athletic programs.

Maintaining balanced budgets becomes increasingly more difficult with constantly changing enrollment numbers throughout the year.

Finally, this bill would place additional strain on the coaching landscape. Finding qualified coaches is already a challenge in many areas, but with teams changing constantly, it becomes nearly impossible to foster a consistent coaching environment. Coaches would have to deal with the difficulty of building team strategies when rosters are in flux week by week, which could lead to frustration and burnout. The disruption of team-building efforts would make it even more difficult to develop leadership skills, perseverance, and a sense of unity among athletes, ultimately hindering the long-term success of athletic programs.

In conclusion, while the intention behind removing time-based consequences for transferring students may seem well-meaning, the potential impacts could severely undermine the integrity of high school athletics. From the loss of community spirit to the challenges posed to team cohesion and coaching, this bill introduces risks that could erode the value of school sports as a key component of student development. Instead of promoting flexibility, this bill could inadvertently damage the very principles that make high school sports an important and rewarding experience for both students and communities. All in all, the underlying foundational goal of public education is to prepare our youth to be contributive members of society, and I do not believe bill reflects that goal.

Thank you for your consideration,

Christopher Thomas – Head Boys Basketball Coach