

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Jacob Willes. I am a college student in Utah as well as a volunteer with Simon's Heart. I am grateful to speak on SB 2099, which addresses the number one threat to the lives of student-athletes: sudden cardiac arrest. This legislation is crucial for increasing awareness and saving lives from preventable tragedies.

Sudden cardiac arrest occurs when the heart unexpectedly stops beating, cutting off blood flow to the brain and vital organs. Every three days, a student-athlete in the United States loses their life to sudden cardiac arrest, making it the leading cause of death for this group. In a two-year study documenting 132 cases of SCA during physical activity, 68 of those students tragically died—leaving a survival rate of less than 50%. However, survival rates of out-of-hospital sudden cardiac arrest incidents increase by more than 400% when both CPR and an AED are used promptly at the scene. These and other statistics show the severity of the situation and therefore the urgent need to implement this bill.

The objectives of SB 2099 aligns with similar legislation, commonly known as the SCA Prevention Act, which is already adopted in 23 other states and currently under consideration in Idaho, Missouri, and Montana. Over the past six months, I have worked with stakeholders in North Dakota to advocate for SB 2099. I've met with the bill's cosponsors to discuss its importance and have had productive conversations with the president of the North Dakota High School Activities Association, who recognizes the urgent need for action to protect student-athletes. Additionally, I've consulted with the Legislative Director of the American Heart Association in North Dakota, whose support has been invaluable. These leaders understand the need for this measure, and their backing demonstrates the importance of implementing these protections.

In conclusion, this bill represents a critical opportunity to save lives through increased education, awareness, and preparedness. We're not asking for entirely new resources, but rather to enhance existing measures to ensure that we are better prepared to respond to these emergencies. Please consider: if it were your child at risk of a cardiac event, wouldn't you want to make sure that those around them were fully equipped to respond and save their life?

I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2099. This is not just a piece of legislation; it's a life-saving measure that will make a tangible difference in protecting student-athletes. Thank you for your time and consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

