

July 26, 2011

EDUCATION FUNDING AND TAXATION COMMITTEE – CONCUSSION STUDY

REPRESENTATIVE KELSCH AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

My name is Andy Dahl, Executive Director of the Missouri Valley Family YMCA in Bismarck. I am here today on behalf of the North Dakota Alliance of YMCAs, which includes the other 4 Ys in the state, located in Fargo, Grand Forks, Jamestown and Minot. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the important topic of concussion awareness, in particular, as it relates to youth sports and the non-profit sector, as you start your interim study of this subject.

Last year the North Dakota Ys engaged 30,336 children of all ages, races, faiths, backgrounds, abilities and income levels from across the state in youth development, nurturing their potential through childcare, enrichment programs, recreation and sports activities. The Ys in North Dakota and nationally, are committed to strengthening communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility.

In addition to Senate Bill 2281 that takes effect here in North Dakota August 1, similar legislation has recently passed in 11 other states, including CO, CT, MA, NE, NJ, NM, OK, OR, RI, VA, WA. Ten of these twelve bills have been limited to public and private schools and in some cases, public parks and recreation programs. Colorado's and Nebraska's legislation does include sports activities of non-profit organizations, but those laws have not been implemented yet. All of the bills are fairly similar in their approach, requiring concussion awareness training of coaches, information to parents, youth and coaches on concussions, and adoption of a policy to pull a youth suspected of suffering from a concussion out of the practice or game until they return with a note from a health care professional.

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The YMCAs of North Dakota believe concussion awareness is an important aspect of working with our coaches, parents and youth, and are committed to working on this issue. Our Ys are working with hospitals now on programs in this regard. We are, however, different from the school sector and public recreation programs since we rely almost exclusively on volunteers to coach our youth sports teams. These volunteers – 2,150 last year - come from all walks of life in their respective communities, have a limited time to spend assisting us with this coaching and usually don't get the chance to get to know the participants as opposed, for example, to the full-time coaching staff at a school with physical education or physiology degrees and on-going relationships with their student players. So there is concern on our part whether a short course would make a volunteer coach *sufficiently* trained to identify a mild concussion for example. As Nebraska and Colorado implement the legislation concerning non-profits we'll have more information on this area that I look forward to sharing with you.

Lastly, I would like to point to the body of research and resources that the Centers for Disease Control Prevention Branch has developed on concussion awareness. Its public awareness campaign, called **Heads Up**, which our national organization, Y-USA endorsed, includes safety tips while playing sports, informational fact sheets for youth, parents, coaches and referees on the signs of concussions and the importance of staying out of play to recuperate. They have PSAs to get media coverage and have developed a free, 30 minute on-line training concussion awareness course for coaches and referees that could provide valuable training for our volunteers. Your committee may want to consider if training programs such as these, for example, would meet the biennial training requirements of SB 2281.

It is questions like these that we would like to work with the committee on, so that YMCAs and other non profit organizations, can partner in this important work to the best of our ability...the ultimate shared goal and priority being the safety of youth sports participants at all levels.

Thank you for your time and the committee's attention to this important issue. I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.