

September 25, 2007

Honorable Louise Williams Bishop
Chairwoman
Children and Youth Committee
327 Main Capitol Bldg.
PO Box 202192
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2192

Dear Representative Bishop:

I submit the attached letter dated September 25, 2007 and respectfully request that it is included as part of the testimony at the September 27, 2007 Children and Youth Committee hearing on the proposal to ban the use of non-wood bats in organized youth baseball and softball (HB1482).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian R. Ross". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely,".

Brian R. Ross
343 Woodbridge Drive
Etters, PA 17319
(717) 932-3424

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Honorable Louise Williams Bishop
Chairwoman
Children and Youth Committee
327 Main Capitol Bldg.
PO Box 202192
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2192

Dear Representative Bishop:

I am writing to you in reference to House Bill 1482 which proposes children under 18 years of age may not use a non-wooden bat to play baseball or softball. I further understand the objective of this act is to provide a safe environment in which children can participate in baseball and softball games. Although I am a coach and member of the Red Land Little League Board, the remarks below are my own and may not necessarily reflect the position of the Red Land Little League.

There is nothing more precious to me than my own children and I take their safety as well as the safety of all the children I work with in youth baseball very seriously. I support any reasonable effort to protect our children from exceedingly dangerous situations. However, I cannot find the data or facts to support the premise that the use of non-wood bats results in a significantly higher risk of serious injury to a player than a wood bat in youth baseball and softball. It appears to me that the evidence upon which this bill is based is anecdotal at best. There is an inherent risk to playing the game of baseball just as there is an inherent risk to driving your child to school in a car. The implication of this legislation is that the number of serious injuries in baseball and softball has risen dramatically since the introduction of non-wood bats. However, according to statistics available through Little League Baseball, the number of serious injuries to pitchers as a result of batted balls has dropped significantly since 1992. Since the early 1960's there have been eight fatalities in Little League as a result of batted balls; six from wood bats and two from non-wood bats. It seems reasonable to me that the Consumer Products Safety Commission would act immediately to ban non-wood bats if they pose an unreasonable risk of injury over wood bats. I simply don't see the evidence that supports the need for our legislators to impose equipment standards on youth baseball and softball in Pennsylvania.

I am fully aware of the debate that exists between the use of wood and non-wood bats. I will concede that there are differences between the performances of these materials but the facts do not support the contention that there is an unreasonable safety risk from one material to another. It is important that our legislators do not confuse performance differences with unreasonable safety risk. The differences in performance between wood and non-wood are an issue among baseball purists. Non-wood bats are hollow, wood bats are solid. A non-wood bat's weight is more evenly distributed and is easier to swing than a wood bat. A wood bat concentrates more of its weight in the barrel (the fat part of the bat) and is harder to swing but the concentrated mass produces a more effective collision with the ball. The non-wood bat has a larger "sweet spot" than a wood bat which allows a player to hit more balls off main part of the bat. In other words, a non-wood bat is more "forgiving"; a wood bat is more likely to break if you hit it too close the handle. There are many factors that affect the speed at which a ball will exit the bat and I could go on-and-on discussing performance differences between wood and non-wood bats. I contend that because of the existing bat standards in youth sports most of these performance differences have little impact on the actual safety of the game. The wood vs. non-wood debate is largely driven by a difference in standards between professional and

amateur baseball which reduces this issue to a discussion on hitting the inside pitch and batting averages, not safety. This legislation presumes there is an increased risk of serious injury with the use of non-wood bats which is simply not supported by the historical safety data I have reviewed.

In addition, youth organizations such as Little League Baseball continually monitor technologies that impact the safety of the game. For example, more than 10 years ago, the major manufacturers of non-wood bats reached an agreement with Little League to limit their bats to a "Bat Performance Factor" (BPF) of 1.15. The BPF is essentially a measure of a non-wood bat's performance (how fast the ball exits the bat when hit) in relation to a standard wood bat's rating. A very good wood bat's BPF is 1.15. I believe that organizations like Little League Baseball will continue to monitor the safety of the game and adjust equipment standards when warranted for the youth participating in their programs. Why do I believe this to be true? Because many of these organizations are run by adult volunteers such as myself and we would not allow the most beloved thing in our lives, our children, to be subjected to unreasonable risk in any sport.

Our local league allows both wood and non-wood bats but the younger players overwhelmingly use the non-wood bats. The non-wood bats tend to be lighter and easier to swing which has important consequences to a six year old T-Ball player. Many smaller children struggle with the weight of bats and mandating the use of a heavier wood bat will likely result in the feeling of failure and reduce the number of children participating in the sport. I suspect that the non-wood bats do increase a younger player's success at the plate because they are easier to swing and have a larger "sweet spot". However, I strongly disagree that non-wood bats are an unreasonable safety risk. The notion that a non-wood bat magically allows a batter to hit a ball with such speed and power that our legislature must take such drastic measures as to make it a crime to use them is unfounded.

Pennsylvania is home to one of the world's most respected youth baseball and softball organizations, Little League Baseball, Inc. This organization has embraced many innovations in the name of safety and has a demonstrated record of reducing injuries associated with baseball and softball. I encourage our legislators to look at actual safety data and strongly consider the recommendations Little League Baseball, Babe Ruth Baseball, T-Ball USA, ASA and other organizations that possess a great deal of expertise on these matters. To ignore the actual data and the opinions of these respected community organizations turns this issue into a matter of political perception which has no place in youth sports and will only serve to further diminish the Pennsylvania voter's confidence in our legislature.

I commend our legislators for their courage in addressing the many difficult issues that face the residents of Pennsylvania today and I believe your hearts are in the right place. However, this legislation takes you down the wrong path of legislating sports standards which could have far reaching consequences. These decisions are better left to existing community organizations and I strongly urge you not to advance this proposal. In this case, the legislature needs to stay out of the game and let the kids play.

Respectfully,



Brian R. Ross
343 Woodbridge Drive
Etters, PA 17319

CC: Representative Scott Perry, 92nd District
Senator Patricia Vance, 31st District