

Legislature Passes Flores' Bill to Protect Students from Head Injuries

Senate Bill 256 Aims to Prevent Youth Sports Concussions

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — The Florida Legislature today unanimously passed a bill that will help prevent head injuries among student athletes in Florida. Sponsored by Senator Anitere Flores, R-Miami, the bill passed unanimously from the Senate and will now be sent to Governor Rick Scott for the opportunity to be signed into law. Educating youth athletes, coaches and parents about the warning signs for concussions, Senate Bill 256 aims to protect injured athletes from getting back into the game too soon.

"I heard personally from concerned constituents about the lack of awareness regarding head injuries and the proper precautions," said Flores. "All too often, athletes get back in the game without fully considering their injuries and the potential for long-term cognitive deficits. I am very proud of the strides that were made today to help protect Florida's student athletes and am thankful for the broad support from both sides of the aisle."

Traumatic brain injuries occur when a player receives a major blow to the head that causes the brain to slam against the skull, resulting in soft tissue injury and cell death. Often, there is a second injury as the brain rebounds against the opposite side of the skull. These injuries can occur in a variety of sports' games, tryouts and practices, including football, volleyball, baseball, lacrosse and cheerleading. According to the Center for Injury Research and Policy, of the approximately 140,000 high school athletes who suffer concussions each year in the United States, more than 40 percent return to play before properly recovering. Such head injuries can have profound effects on children with developing brains. In extreme cases, injuries can even lead to death.

Currently, at least 30 other states have adopted legislation similar to Flores' bill, which is supported by the National Football League and the National Collegiate Athletic Association. SB 256 will educate parents, student athletes and coaches on the risk and identification of brain injuries. It also authorizes the Florida High School Athletic Association and coaches' associations to create rules for removing student athletes when brain injuries occur, and it establishes a policy to return players back to play after their recovery with the authorization of a doctor.

Seventeen-year-old Miami-Dade County resident David Goldstein and his parents, Adam and Cheryl Goldstein, were among the advocates who came to Tallahassee this session to advocate in support of the bill. David suffered a serious head injury in 2010 when he collided with another soccer player during the district finals for his school team. He knew immediately that something was not right, but he stayed in the game. In the days that followed, David exhibited flu-like symptoms followed by weeks without improvement. The Goldstein family went through months of medical consultations before identifying the proper treatment. Today, David is wise to the potential risks, wears protective headgear and knows how to identify the warning signs of traumatic brain injuries. He has also become an advocate for athlete education and concussion testing at local public schools in his area.

"David's example resonates because this scary situation could happen to any player and any parent of a student athlete," added Flores. "Without being educated about the potential risks, parents are simply unaware of the symptoms their child might be experiencing. SB 256 will help individuals assess these situations and provide the proper care."