



**CONCUSSION & CTE**  
FOUNDATION

Dear Senators,

I strongly urge your support of Senate Bill 26-060, Alyssa's Youth Concussion and Mental Health Protection Act (Alyssa's Act).

I am the founding CEO of the Concussion & CTE Foundation, and my life was profoundly impacted by a concussion I suffered while a WWE professional wrestler in 2003. Knowing the mental health challenges I experienced, I now consider myself lucky to be in my 20's when I suffered my brain injury, as I was mature enough to address the challenges of depression, anxiety, and cognitive impairment while dealing with daily pain from chronic post-traumatic headaches. That experience, combined with my training as a behavioral neuroscientist, I am certain we don't do enough to protect children from those same mental health challenges that can follow a concussion.

For years, concussion policy has focused appropriately on identification and physical recovery. But we now understand that the consequences of a concussion can extend beyond the immediate injury, including measurable impacts on mood, behavior, and mental health. This bill addresses this gap in supporting our children.

SB26-060 is a practical, measured step forward. It ensures that coaches receive annual education about the mental health risks associated with concussion and that parents are informed when their child sustains a head injury. It does not create unnecessary bureaucracy. It strengthens communication, awareness, and early intervention.

From a public health standpoint, education is prevention. When coaches understand warning signs and families are aware of potential mental health changes, we reduce the risk of missed symptoms, prolonged suffering, and avoidable crises.

Youth sports are an important part of Colorado communities. This bill helps safeguard the mental well-being of the young athletes who participate in them. It is fiscally responsible, evidence-aligned, and focused squarely on protecting kids. I respectfully ask you to vote yes on SB26-060.

Sincerely,

Chris Nowinski, PhD  
Co-founder & CEO  
[Concussion & CTE Foundation](http://www.concussionandcte.org)



To the Members of the Colorado General Assembly,

As a brain injury physician and neuroscientist for the past 19 years, including serving as Co-Director of Sport Concussion at Mass General Brigham and Director of the HealthSpan Laboratory at Spaulding Rehabilitation, my clinical and research work has focused on concussion, traumatic brain injury, and their short and long term effects on brain health and mental health, particularly in children and adolescents. I am writing to express my strong support for Alyssa's Youth Concussion and Mental Health Protection Act.

This legislation addresses a critical and often overlooked aspect of youth concussion care. While concussions are commonly understood as acute injuries, these brain injuries can meaningfully affect mood, behavior, emotional regulation, and overall mental health. In young people, these effects may emerge days or weeks after injury and are frequently misunderstood or missed entirely.

From both a clinical and scientific perspective, the link between concussion and mental health outcomes in youth is well established. Children and adolescents who sustain concussions are at increased risk for symptoms such as depression, anxiety, irritability, emotional dysregulation, and academic or social withdrawal. These challenges can be exacerbated when adults around the child lack awareness of what to look for or how to respond.

Alyssa's Youth Concussion and Mental Health Protection Act takes an important and practical step by strengthening education for those most closely involved in youth sports. Requiring regular mental health focused concussion education for coaches and encouraging communication with families following a concussion helps ensure that potential warning signs are recognized earlier and addressed more effectively. This kind of informed vigilance can lead to timely support, appropriate referrals, and better recovery trajectories for young athletes.

Adolescence represents a uniquely sensitive period of brain development. Injuries during this time can disrupt neural systems involved in emotional regulation and stress response, particularly when combined with the pressures of school, athletics, and social development. Legislation that acknowledges this vulnerability and promotes proactive mental health awareness is both medically sound and ethically responsible.

Equally important, this bill sends a clear message to young people and their families that mental health symptoms following concussion are real, valid, and deserving of care. Reducing stigma and normalizing help seeking behavior after brain injury has the potential to prevent significant suffering and, in some cases, save lives.

I commend the family members and advocates who have brought this legislation forward with courage, compassion, and determination. Honoring Alyssa Peterson's legacy through meaningful action that protects other young people is a powerful and necessary step forward.

I strongly encourage your support of Alyssa's Youth Concussion and Mental Health Protection Act and thank you for your attention to this critical issue affecting the health and wellbeing of Colorado's youth.

Respectfully,

Daniel H. Daneshvar, MD, PhD

Good afternoon, Chair & members of the Committee. Thank you for hearing my testimony today. My name is Gil Lucero, and I am a youth athletics coach and advocate with Mental Health Colorado testifying in support of Senate Bill 60.

Over the past 25 years coaching high school and middle school athletics, I have witnessed firsthand the evolving approach to managing concussions in student athletes. In January 2012, the Colorado High School Activities Association (CHSAA) implemented mandatory training for coaches focused on identifying concussions. This training has been invaluable in helping coaches recognize physical symptoms and respond appropriately.

Typically, at the varsity level or when a certified athletic trainer is present, the trainer takes the lead in notifying parents and outlining the course of action for the student athlete. The trainer also collaborates with the school counselor to create accommodations, such as limiting screen time, reducing exposure to bright lights, and other necessary steps to ensure the student's recovery.

While this system is effective for the physical management of concussions, there has been limited formal guidance for coaches on recognizing and addressing the mental health impacts of these injuries. In my role as both a teacher and coach, I am uniquely positioned to observe student athletes in the classroom and athletic environments. I have witnessed students experience anger, frustration, and anxiety following a concussion. Many struggle to articulate the source of these feelings, which can lead to academic challenges, including difficulty focusing and declining grades.

As a coach, it can be difficult to provide support for students navigating these mental health challenges while also maintaining their athletic engagement. I strongly believe that additional training on the mental health implications of concussions would empower coaches with the knowledge and strategies needed to support their athletes more effectively. With better preparation, coaches could recognize early signs of emotional distress, implement coping strategies, and work collaboratively with trainers, counselors, and families to help student athletes recover both physically and mentally, ultimately allowing them to return safely and confidently to the field of play.

I urge you to vote 'yes' on Senate Bill 60. Thank you for listening to my testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions.

My name is Lucille Estrada  
Grandparent of Alyssa Peterson. Spearfish, SD 57783  
605-641-6030  
email lucilleestrada41@gmail.com

I support Alyssa's Act SB26-060 because of the connection between concussions & mental health is very important in young athletes and is very important. The awareness within our medical professionals need not be taken lightly. This matter should be educated on all professionals at time when they are getting certifications to obtain their CEU'S. Alyssa was a very quiet girl and stayed to herself, and did her best in all of her physical sports. Please pass this act to save others. I miss her so much. Thank you for taking care of this matter.

Lucille Estrada  
1916 Tumbleweed Trail  
Spearfish SD 57783

To: Members of the Health & Human Services Committee

From: Morgan's Message, Inc.

Dona Rodgers, Co-Founder

[dona@morgansmessage.org](mailto:dona@morgansmessage.org), (703) 401-2882

Zip Code: 20155

RE: *Mental Health Training in Concussion Education*

On behalf of Morgan's Message, we want to register our support for the *Mental Health Training in Concussion Education* legislation, which would amplify mental health resources and require training for coaches to recognize signs of mental illness and behavioral distress in student-athletes. Morgan's Message is a non-profit organization that aims to amplify stories, resources and expertise to strengthen student-athlete mental health, build a community by and for athletes through peer-to-peer conversations, and provide a platform for advocacy.

Student-athletes can face immense pressure to succeed in their sport, which can negatively impact their mental health. According to multiple studies, college athletes have a higher risk for mental health issues than non-athletes. Additionally, the latest NCAA Student-Athlete Well-Being study reported that athletes felt only 53% of coaches take the mental health concerns of their student-athletes seriously (NCAA, 2022). This likely results from coaches being ill-equipped to identify warning signs and connect struggling students with needed support.

Our organization was founded in 2020 in the wake of losing our beloved daughter, sister, friend, and teammate, Morgan Rodgers. Morgan was a vibrant D1 lacrosse player at Duke University who tragically died by suicide in July 2019 after navigating mental health challenges following a devastating knee injury. Despite putting on a happy face, Morgan suffered in silence, keeping family and friends in the dark as she battled her mental health.

In Morgan's memory, Morgan's Message strives to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health and works to equalize the treatment of physical and mental health. We work directly with more than 6,000 high school and collegiate student-athletes, empowering them with education to share within their communities, and encouraging them as leaders and mental health advocates so that no one feels alone or loses their Morgan. In Colorado specifically, our program is active on 21 campuses, with 42 student-athlete campus ambassadors leading courageous conversations and taking action.

*Mental Health Training in Concussion Education* first requires a coach of an organized youth athletic activity to take an annual mental health education course. The bill requires the concussion recognition education course for youth athletic coaches in middle, junior, and high schools to include information on the relationship between concussions and mental health. Second, it requires that a coach inform parents or guardians of a youth athlete who sustains a concussion of possible changes in mental health as a result of a concussion.

Public schools that offer athletic programs would be required to provide training to coaches based on those guidelines so that coaches can better detect when a student-athlete is exhibiting symptoms of conditions like anxiety, depression, disordered eating, and suicidal ideation. It would also teach coaches best practices for approaching students compassionately and referring them to appropriate resources.

This bill will not only amplify mental health resources but will also identify at-risk athletes, especially those post-concussion, and connect them with care. Arming coaches with the tools to spot and intervene when a student shows signs of struggle will increase help-seeking behavior on campuses and save lives. Similar bills were recently enacted in Ohio, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. We hope Colorado will take similar action to support the mental health of its students and student-athletes.

During the last two decades, suicide rates for Americans ages 10 to 24 rose 62% (CDC). *Mental Health Training in Concussion Education* is a common-sense measure to safeguard the well-being of young athletes across our state. The guidelines and training will amplify access to mental healthcare, help identify at-risk youth and connect them to support and empower coaches to create a culture of health and safety for the students they mentor. On behalf of Morgan's Message, we urge a favorable report.



Chief Mountain Sports & Consulting  
Robert L. Doore, President/CEO  
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PH: 406.696.5534

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March 10, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Senate Health & Human Services Committee,

My name is Robert Doore, and I am representing myself and my company to testify in support of SB26-060: Mental Health Training in Concussion Education (Alyssa's Act).

SB26-060 takes a practical, prevention-focused approach by requiring basic mental health education for youth athletic coaches and ensuring parents are informed when a concussion may impact a child's mental health. This bill does not turn coaches into clinicians; it gives them common-sense tools to recognize warning signs, communicate clearly with families, and help prevent crises before they escalate.

This bill is important because I work with athletes (current/former) across Colorado and the country setting them up for success after their athletic career ends. Mental Health and Concussions are one of the most impactful issues with today's athletes from HS to College and Professional levels. One of the most alarming facts is the number of U.S. collegiate athletes who died by suicide doubled between 2002 and 2022, according to a study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine. Suicide is now the second most common cause of death, after accidents, in this group.

We need to move from AWARENESS TO ACTION and this bill is action.

I urge you to support SB26-060 to strengthen youth safety, support coaches, and protect the mental health of Colorado's young athletes.

Thank you for your time and service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert L. Doore', written over a circular scribble.

Robert L. Doore,  
President/CEO  
Athlete to Executive

Honorable Members of the Senate Health & Human Services Committee,

My name is Alisse Sanchez. I am Alyssa Peterson's Cousin. Even though I don't live in Colorado Alyssa's passing has impact my family and I in so many ways.

I support Alyssa's Act SB26-060 because increasing awareness to concussions and mental health is very important. No family should ever have to go through something like this and experience it without understanding signs and risks that they might see in their student athlete.

I respectfully ask you to support Alyssa's Act SB26-060 because raising awareness and educating others on these risks could help other future student athletes. Athletes are often strong and push through a lot of injuries and hard times without fully understanding the impact it will have. Better awareness and education can help protect other families.

I respectfully ask you to support Alyssa's Act SB26-060 and the efforts to help protect young athletes.

Thank you for you time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Alisse Sanchez

Sykesville, Maryland

alisse4421@iCloud.com

443-823-0593

Too often, changes in a young person's mental health go unnoticed until a crisis occurs. By ensuring coaches receive regular education on youth mental health, SB26-060 helps create more supportive environments where young people can be seen, heard, and connected to help sooner..." I am a parent of one of those young people, writing to ask you to support of SB26-060, because of my family's lived, preventable, experience. My son was a champion wrestler for two short years. He had to quit the sport all together at the beginning of his Junior year of high school as Varsity team captain. Reason he had to quit: mental health challenges became physical health challenges - he had severely disordered eating, lost friends, and required acute medical attention. Mental health training of his coach would have better supported my son and our family: Disordered eating and maintaining a dangerously low BMI would have been recognized as unhealthy. He would have been coached instead to, build muscle mass, and wrestle up a weight class. Staying at an unreasonably low weight to fill a slot on the team would not have been acceptable to prioritize over my son's mental and physical health The coach also would have been better equipped to recognize my son's drug use as a SYMPTOM of his struggling, and a plea for help, rather than a cause to discredit and shun a Varsity athlete This is but one family's story, but sadly, we are not alone. Mental illness in the form of disordered eating affects all genders, particularly in sports such as: wrestling, skating, skiing, running, equestrian events. Disordered eating also happens to be the deadliest of all mental health conditions. Please help save future youth athletes from death or a lifetime of struggles. Annual mental health training would help coaches to be better equipped in supporting athletes and their families by helping them to: 1) Recognize signs of mental health challenges - often as SYMPTOMS of other challenges in the student athlete lives (such as unhealthy eating habits in the name of winning or filling a particular slot on a team) 2) Understand potential mental health impacts of head injuries - because signs from traumatic brain injuries can sometimes be mistaken as "adolescence" and go unsupported 3) Communicate with families when a young person may need additional support - with better tools to apply in a collaborative and solution-oriented dialogue instead of dismissive or accusatory Thank you for supporting!

Doreen Harris, Brain Wave Advocate

I am writing in support of the *Mental Health Training in Concussion Education* bill. As a current collegiate student-athlete who was a high school student-athlete in Colorado, I am asking for your consideration and a vote in support of this legislation. This bill requires the development of a framework for all coaches to receive training on student mental health.

I'd like to share my story with you so that you understand why the passage of this legislation is so important to us as athletes. When I was in high school, I was diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and PTSD. As a varsity athlete on the cross-country and track team at my school, I have been able to use running as an essential outlet throughout my mental health journey. Running is an individual sport; it's you against yourself against the clock. Mental strength is one of the biggest components of what makes a runner a good runner. When I first received my mental health diagnosis, I was terrified to share how I was feeling with anyone, but especially with my teammates and coaches. So much of running is reliant on mental strength; admitting that I was struggling with my mental health felt like admitting that I was a weak athlete. I am forever grateful that my head cross country and track coach in high school also happened to be my school counselor. Having him as a safe person to go to on and off the field, who understood student mental health, empowered me to realize that my mental health struggles didn't mean that I was a bad athlete. Because of my coach's background in mental health, I was able to go to him on bad days, on good days, and I slowly understood that I am more than my mental health, more than my sport, more than my academic performance. Now, as a collegiate student-athlete, running takes up a huge part of my life—it's my part-time job on top of school. While in season, I spend more time with my teammates and coach than I do with anyone else. Because of the mental health training that my high school coach had, which allowed him to be an essential form of support throughout my high school academic and athletic career, I feel empowered—not ashamed—to go to therapy, take meds, talk about my mental health with my college coach while also competing at a high level. Every student athlete deserves to have a coach that support them as a whole human being, rather than just an athlete; and that starts with mental health education.

Colorado has an opportunity to take the lead in advocating for all student-athletes and recognizing the importance of their mental health. Knowledge is power, and empowering all of our coaches with training to recognize our students who may be struggling benefits our entire community. Let's break the stigma about mental health in sports.

Please support the passage of *Mental Health Training in Concussion Education*. Thank you for your consideration.

Kindly,

Sophia Shiroff, alum of Denver East High School, Student Athlete at Allegheny College



Ashley Perales  
Senior Manager of Development & Operations  
Mental Health Colorado  
[Aperales@mentalhealthcolorado.org](mailto:Aperales@mentalhealthcolorado.org)  
719-722-7900

March 12, 2026

Chair and Members of the Senate Health & Human Services Committee,

I'm writing in support of Senate Bill 60 as the parent of a young athlete and as a representative of Mental Health Colorado's Brain Wave advocacy network.

Sports are a big part of our family's lives. My son spends hours with his coaches almost every day of the week, often more time than he spends with any other adult outside our home. The coaches see my son when he's energized and confident, but also when he's frustrated, exhausted, or struggling. As parents, we rely on coaches to help keep our kids safe, not just physically, but emotionally too.

Mental Health Colorado has worked since 1953 to achieve parity between mental and physical health. We know that mental health, like physical health, is something we all have, and we all need access to support to maintain our overall well-being.

Access to healthcare, supports and services is especially important right now because Colorado continues to face a youth mental health crisis. Last year alone, Children's Hospital Colorado reported a **26% increase in emergency room visits related to youth mental health**. And between 2020 and 2024, the number of young people needing inpatient mental health care rose by more than **55%**. Our kids are struggling, and we must respond.

This bill won't solve the crisis on its own, but it will help.

Nearly every parent I know has a child involved in some kind of sport, and I believe every one of them would feel more confident knowing their kids are supported by coaches who have the tools and knowledge to recognize and respond to mental health concerns. The Colorado High School Coaches Association serves more than **3,000 coaches across our state**- that's AT LEAST 3,000 additional adults who could be better prepared to help a young person before they reach a point of crisis.



When we talk about youth safety, mental health must be part of the conversation. Some athletic programs do this well, but clearer expectations are needed to support coaches in this role. This bill helps close that gap.

I want my son, and all children in Colorado, to grow up in athletic environments where mental health is taken seriously, where coaches feel supported, and where asking for help is normalized.

Senate Bill 60 moves us closer to that reality.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 60 to protect young athletes, support families, and ensure mental health is treated as an essential part of youth safety in Colorado.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ashley Perales", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ashley Perales

## **SB26-060 Youth Coaches Mental Health Education & Concussion Awareness**

**(Sen. Lindsey Daugherty and Sen Rod Pelton)**

Greetings to our Senators here today, and thank you for your time. My name is Erin Harrop, PhD, MSW, LICSW. I am a licensed medical social worker, mental health therapist, and Assistant Professor at the University of Denver. I'm also the parent of three children in the Cherry Creek School District.

Youth sports programs played a huge role in my adolescence and young adulthood. This formational experience turned into a lifelong passion for sport. Youth sports provided a foundation for me to build skills, foster a positive connection with my body, increase my fitness and confidence, and learn to be both a leader AND a team player. I played volleyball throughout middle and high school, going on to play collegiate rugby. I also coached youth volleyball for 12 years following.

As an athlete, minor injuries like bruises, scrapes, and twisted ankles were common; major injuries less so. Once during volleyball practice, I collided with a soccer goal while running down a long ball, resulting in a concussion and 16 staples. In rugby, during my freshman season, I broke my arm and maxed out with three concussions, so I was required to ride the bench the rest of the season. These injuries felt like the end of the world at the time. I begged my coaches to let me play anyway—I told them I felt fine, and honestly, I believed it.

But concussions are tricky things, and predicting recovery is difficult. Two years ago, my wife experienced a concussion while working as a paraeducator in Douglas County schools. Her neurological symptoms lasted months, preventing her from working the remainder of the school year; as a therapist, I suspected ongoing cognitive and emotional symptoms for over a year following her brain injury. Similarly, a friend of mine who was a graduate student, experienced a concussion during their doctoral program that severely impacted their vision, concentration, and mental clarity, resulting in painful migraines for over 18 months following their injury. Thankfully, they recovered enough to return to school and finish their PhD.

While both my wife and friend recovered, the ongoing impact of their traumatic brain injuries have given me a new appreciation for concussion protocols. No amount of playing time, no game, no season is worth the health of your brain.

In reflecting on this bill, I remembered a time when I had a player with a seemingly mild concussion. As a coach in Washington State at the time, we had had relatively strong concussion laws. I remember feeling as if our athletic trainer was being a bit dramatic by insisting my player sit out at least a month. My frustration intensified when one month turned to two, as she was still experiencing neurological symptoms—despite how fine she seemed. Today, having seen the huge impacts concussions can have, I'm grateful that our states concussion laws helped me keep perspective and prioritize my player's health, however ruefully. She went on to be a star varsity athlete and excel in college, and I shudder to think of the cost she could have paid if I had gone with my gut—that she was fine.

Youth coaches can be an amazing force for good in a youth's life. Equipping them with the knowledge and skills to look out for their players' neurological and mental health—in addition to their physical health is a win-win. Research has shown that when coaches are knowledgeable about concussions AND mental health, referrals for early intervention services, communication with parents about symptom management, and player disclosure of emotional distress ALL increase, preventing more acute crises down the line. With this in mind, I ask for your support on bill SB26-060.



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Thursday, March 12, 26

To: Colorado Senate Health and Human Services Committee

From: Dr. Lowell Wightman

Reg: SB26-60 Mental Health Training in Concussion Ed

This legislation is essential for the growth of sport health awareness, player safety, and growing the base of concussion health care knowledge. Without the passing of this legislation more student athletes will unknowingly suffer from concussion and possible brain injury.

The strength of this bill is not just about education because it asks coaches and community to be responsible for notifying parents that their child has possibly sustained a concussion. With this action, support for the athlete can be focused effectively and administered in a timely fashion.

Finally, this bill will connect all schools public and private to be responsible for comprehensive mental health training and concussion education.

I anxiously ready for this bill to be passed and actively followed.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Lowell Wightman'.

Lowell Wightman, M.Ed., PhD.  
CEO 360 Mindset



“We cannot solve today’s problems with the same thinking that created them.”

Albert Einstein

Honorable Members of the Senate Health & Human Services Committee,

My name is Steve Sanchez. I am Alyssa Peterson's uncle. Although I live outside of Colorado, Alyssa's loss has deeply impacted our entire family.

I support Alyssa's Act SB26-060 because increasing awareness about the connection between concussions and mental health in young athletes is so important. No family should have to experience a tragedy like this without understanding the possible warning signs and risks.

I respectfully ask you to support Alyssa's Act SB26-060 and the efforts to better protect young athletes.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Steven R. Sanchez  
Sykesville, Maryland  
[srs6003@yahoo.com](mailto:srs6003@yahoo.com)  
410-999-5140

## **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 60 Mental Health Training for Youth Athletics Coaches**

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify today. My name is Max Karpinski, and I am an intern at Mental Health Colorado, an organization that seeks to advocate for every Coloradan who experiences a mental health or substance use condition. I am here today to support Senate Bill 60, Youth Coaches Mental Health Education & Concussion Awareness.

This legislation would be a huge step towards addressing the youth mental health crisis in our state. Coaches, sports, and athletic activities play a very important role in children's development. Coaches not only teach athletics, but they are mentors, role models and trusted adults who often spend more time with student athletes than most other school faculty. This makes their position particularly important when it comes to noticing early warning signs of mental health struggles such as anxiety, depression, burnout, suicidal thoughts, and other pathologies.

With rates of mental health struggles worsening amongst youth, we are at a time where legislation like this is needed more than ever to prevent further crises. Despite this, many coaches receive little to no training in recognizing or responding to mental health problems. This bill would change that. By equipping coaches of young athletes with basic mental health training, we can build support and a stronger safety net for our young people. We can promote early intervention, prevent crises, and reduce health-based discrimination. Having access to services at a younger age yields higher results as untreated trauma amongst youth puts adult survivors at higher risk, they are 15 times more likely to attempt suicide, 4 times more likely to experience harms from alcohol use, 4 times more likely to inject drugs, 3 times more likely to absent from work, and twice as likely to have serious financial problems.

As someone who witnessed childhood trauma and was also heavily involved in sports, this bill speaks to me on a personal level. Instead of feeling supported as a child when I was suffering from abuse and neglect, I was seen as a failure or someone who was declining with no explanation. Due to being from a privileged background, the signs of abuse were well hidden—and it would have taken someone with training and understanding to identify a problem. Any support from an adult at that time would have been validating and empowering. With mentorship I could have found an alternate route from depression and addiction that could have saved me years of anguish and despair. It is only through luck and access to services in adulthood that I am able to stand before you now to advocate for a bill that could heal our society at its foundations. I urge you to support Senate Bill 60. Thank you for your time and consideration.

To: Members of the Health & Human Services Committee

From: *Leeann Passaro, COO of The Hidden Opponent*

551-804-6328

[leeann@thehiddenopponent.org](mailto:leeann@thehiddenopponent.org)

936 P St NW

Washington, DC, 20001

RE: Mental Health Training in Concussion Education

I am writing in support of the *Mental Health Training in Concussion Education* bill. The Hidden Opponent is a non-profit advocacy group that raises awareness for student-athlete mental health and takes action to create a healthier overall sports culture. We aim to advocate for student-athlete well-being, educate on mental health and related topics, and support those currently going through difficult times.

Our Campus Captains program allows student-athletes across the country to serve as ambassadors of our mission on their college campuses. This year, our organization has 6 ambassadors in Colorado, ranging from high school students to college athletes. As such, I am asking for your consideration and a vote in support of this legislation, which requires the development of a framework for all coaches to receive training on student mental health.

The Feely sisters – Bridget and Brianna – have been involved in our Campus Captains program for over two years. Bridget Feely graduated from Western Colorado University in 2025, where she played NCAA soccer, after graduating from Standley Lake High School in Westminster, Colorado. During her undergraduate career, Bridget was a standout Campus Captain ambassador for our cause and helped implement lasting mental health change in her community. Bridget then encouraged her younger sister, Brianna, to join the Campus Captains program and start a chapter of The Hidden Opponent at Standley Lake High School.

While Bridget is now graduated from college, she continues to support our mission today as a program mentor to other high school students in Colorado, including her sister, Brianna. As a mentor, Bridget provides essential peer support to her high school cohort, helping them through our Campus Captains program, the stress of the college recruiting process, and the general ups and downs of high school athletics. Bridget exemplifies our mission of mental health leadership. However, this peer-to-peer model

is best supplemented by coaches and athletic administrators who are also equipped to handle mental health crises and point students in the right direction towards professional help. Coaches are some of the most meaningful mentors that athletes will encounter in their lives. It's imperative that coaches feel prepared and confident to communicate about mental health with their athletes. As a recently former teacher and high school coach myself, I can attest that the mental health crisis is one of the most forefront issues that our young people are facing today.

Maryland has an opportunity to take the lead in advocating for all student-athletes and recognizing the importance of their mental health. Knowledge is power, and empowering all of our coaches with training to recognize our students who may be struggling benefits everyone. Help us support our youth.

Please support the passage of *Mental Health Training in Concussion Education*. Thank you for your consideration.

**Senate Health & Human Services**

**03/12/2026 01:30 PM**

**SB26-060 Mental Health Training in Concussion Ed**

**Typed Text of Testimony Submitted**

<b>Name, Position, Representing</b>	<b>Typed Text of Testimony</b>
Ethan Andrade  For  himself	<p>Good afternoon, Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Ethan Andrade and I am here representing myself. I am here in support of SB26-060 because I am an athlete and a coach and a person with lived experience of what a coaching style can do to a student's mental health but also what a concussion can do to an athlete.</p> <p>I have been a wrestler since I was 3 years old and absolutely love sports. I wrestled in club wrestling, recreational clubs as well as during middle school, high school and then at the college level. During my freshman year in college, I was wrestling a tournament and sustained a pretty bad concussion, I finished the tournament and I do not remember it. After the tournament, I was very sick and I felt the pressure to push through it. Three months after the concussion, I went to a very dark place, life events happened and with a very supportive family I am here to tell my story and help others feel they are not alone. I feel that if my family would have been aware of the mental health crisis effects, I would have gotten help and support before I was in a crisis.</p> <p>I have since coached at the high school level and took the mental health education for coaches and am a strong believer that we need to help every coach understand the effects of their coaching and how they can embrace the competitive spirit but also let the youth know they care about their well-being. Mental health is not something to be ashamed of it is something that happens to everyone, and talking about it and supporting each other is how we make sure we do not lose children and adults. I am very thankful that my family and my support system talk about our mental health, because I now have the future I was always meant to have.</p>

	<p>Please vote yes on SB26-060 because we need to make our athletes feel they are heard and seen and not just for their athletic abilities, mental health and concussions need to be tied together.</p>
<p>Jordan Meadows  For  themselves</p>	<p>Chair and Members of the Committee:</p> <p>Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony in strong support of SB26'060. I am the Founder and CEO of the Mental Health Alliance for Athletes (MHAA), a Colorado-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to connecting athletes and coaches with qualified mental health and TBI care providers, delivering mental health and concussion-related education to athletes of all ages, facilitating peer support groups, and helping families afford treatment expenses.</p> <p>As both a career hockey player and youth coach, I understand firsthand the stigma and unrecognized risks that follow traumatic brain injuries. Over 25 years of playing, I sustained 20 documented concussions. Those experiences shaped my commitment to prevention and education. Because of them, I make certain every player under my supervision is properly evaluated for any suspected concussion, and I personally ensure parents are aware of the risks, warning signs, and possible mental health changes that can result.</p> <p>SB26'060 addresses a critical gap by requiring coaches of youth athletic programs to receive annual mental health education and to communicate concussion-related mental health risks with families. Coaches are often the first people to recognize subtle shifts in behavior or focus after an injury. This bill empowers them to act more effectively – not only to protect the athlete's body but also their mind.</p>

	<p>Integrating mental health awareness into concussion training is consistent with modern sports medicine and neurology recommendations and reflects Colorado's commitment to the well-being of young athletes. These educational requirements are a small investment with a tremendous return in safety, resilience, and lifelong health.</p> <p>On behalf of the athletes, coaches, and families our organization serves, I respectfully urge a Yes vote on SB26'060. Colorado's youth deserve comprehensive protection that recognizes mental health as an essential part of athletic safety.</p> <p>Respectfully submitted,</p> <p>Jordan Meadows          Founder &amp; CEO, Mental Health Alliance for Athletes          jmeadows@mhaacolorado.org   (505) 249-2711</p>
<p>Marissa Sanchez          For          herself</p>	<p>My name is Marissa Sanchez, I am Alyssa's Cousin from Eldersburg, Maryland. I want to speak out on how Alyssa's passing has affected my life in the hopes that this Act can help save children in the future from experiencing the same thing our family had to go through. Alyssa was such a huge light in our family and was the center of some of the best family memories I have. I would have never imagined that in my whole lifetime, Alyssa would make such an impactful decision. Alyssa never seemed like the kind of girl who would've taken a permanent solution to temporary problems; she was so full of joy and always smiling whenever we saw her. I hope that no kid ever has to feel like they need to take the easy way out in the same way Alyssa did. I believe this Act is so important, even if it just saves one more child. As our family has experienced, it can be so incredibly hard to detect mental health issues in children, especially if the people they spend a majority of their time with, such as coaches, are not educated for every situation a child may be in. I feel this education for coaches could help save more children's lives in a way</p>

	<p>that has not been widely talked about before, regarding the connection between concussions and mental health.</p> <p>If this Act can protect one more family from the pain and grief we have gone through, then I believe it is more than worth it.</p> <p>Thank you, Marissa Sanchez</p>
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Good afternoon, members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Elly Wright and I am representing myself. Thank you for the chance to speak in support of SB26-060: Mental Health Training in Concussion Education. I am a Certified and Licensed Athletic Trainer in the state of Colorado. Over the last seven years practicing in sports medicine, I have seen countless examples of coaches impacting student athlete mental health, both for the worse and the better. I believe coaches have a great opportunity to impact the athletes they work with each day, but without proper mental health education that impact can be quite negative. Athletes in youth sports are vulnerable and still actively trying to figure out who they are. They are subject to many influences, one of the most important being their coach. I see repeatedly how easy it is for them to feel lost, define their worth based on athletic performance, or feel like they need to change to fit in or earn playing time. I have also watched athletes fighting tears in practice or leaving in an angry storm because of the way they were spoken to by their coach. I have witnessed instances of athletes being told their problems aren't real problems and that they need to just "get over it" because this week's game is more important. Unfortunately, I believe this behavior is still present in much of athletics at all levels and I believe athletes deserve better. Those in positions of influence, such as a Coach, should be well educated on what these athletes are going through and how it affects them so they can properly respond.

As a Certified Athletic Trainer, I also see the effects of concussions on my athletes every day. I have watched what was a completely "normal" athlete have their lives turned upside down by a concussion and deal with symptoms for years after. There is a specific instance I can think of where I had an athlete attempt to take her own life due to the depression she experienced post-concussion. Luckily, she had the proper support to get the help she needed or that situation could have ended very differently. Parents deserve to know when their children are suffering and when they may need help. Concussions can dramatically alter a person's state of mind, so parent and Coach education and awareness is essential to make sure athletes are being properly taken care of.

I urge you to vote yes on SB26-060 because youth athletes in Colorado deserve to have the people around them prepared to help if they are struggling with their mental health. They deserve to be seen and have every resource available to help them succeed. Thank you for listening.

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