



Delaware Governor Jack A. Markell
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Governor Signs Law to Protect Student Athletes from Concussions

NFL-backed law requires more education, formalizes DIAA rules

DOVER, DE – Junior high and high school athletes and their parents will get more information on concussions and their effects and coaches will be getting more training on how to spot a possible concussion under a law signed Tuesday by Governor Jack Markell.

The new law also formalizes the Delaware Interscholastic Athletic Association's existing policy on requiring a medical clearance before athletes who have received a concussion can return to play.

"When you look at the data and the long-term effects of concussions – especially repeat concussions – it paints an alarming picture," Markell said. "Sports has gone beyond outdated adages about getting 'dinged,' 'playing tough,' and getting back into the game. Concussion can be serious, potentially life-changing injuries. We're stepping up and treating them with the seriousness they deserve."

The Governor was joined at the signing by Philadelphia Eagles legend Vince Papale as well as lawmakers, coaches, student athletes, representatives of the DIAA and medical community.

Under the new law, athletes and their parents will get information on concussions when they sign sports consent forms. Coaches will be required to receive training on how to spot possible concussions. The new law also puts into state law the DIAA's current rule requiring athletes, who have sustained a concussion or are believed to have sustained a concussion to receive a medical clearance before they can resume play.

Papale said the putting the rule into the law is a good move.

"It is the nature of an athlete to want to stay in the game," Papale said. "The invincible attitude is why great athletes perform as they do. We need to make sure that when it comes to kids especially, that we look out for their long-term health. We owe them that much."

An estimate from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says there are between 1.6 million and 3.8 million sports-related concussions nationally each year, and the CDC says about 135,000 athletes involved in youth sports are taken to hospitals to be checked for brain injuries.

“My son plays a number of sports, including football,” said Sen. Bethany Hall-Long, D-Middletown, the bill’s prime sponsor. “I think he’s learned a lot of valuable lessons from them, but as much as we like seeing our children do something they enjoy, we need to do as much as we can to make sure our children are safe when they’re playing. I think this law helps us down that path by giving coaches the training they need as well as educating parents and athletes about concussions.”

Rep. Rebecca D. Walker, D-Middletown, shepherded the bill through the House and said she thinks it will help keep young people healthier.

“As a nurse and mother of athletes, I know the importance of ensuring the safety of our young people following an injury,” Walker said. “We need to make sure that our kids no longer will be returned to the fields without being properly and carefully examined. This is the type of legislation that will protect our young people and have an everlasting effect on our athletes’ wellbeing. This type of legislation I came to Dover to introduce and have passed and signed into law.”

Studies have shown that young people can take longer to recover from concussions than adults. And, when someone has suffered a concussion, the odds of getting a second concussion increase – especially if they haven’t fully recovered from their earlier concussion. There’s also a growing body of scientific evidence linking concussions to problems, including memory loss and changes in behavior.

And as athletes become more physically powerful, Sen. Joe Booth, R-Georgetown, agreed that protections are needed.

“In my years of playing contact sports, it would seem like this legislation is overdue,” said Booth, who co-sponsored the measure. “The players are bigger, faster and the prevention and attention this bill provides will be a positive step forward.”

The new law also meshes with the NFL’s national effort to encourage greater awareness of concussions and their effects. And Jeff Miller, a senior vice president with the league, praised the state for taking action

“The NFL is changing the culture of sports as it relates the head injuries,” he said. “Laws like the one Governor Markell signs today will do just that by making youth sports safer for the boys and girls who play them.”