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Access for Student Athletes Coalition Calls on FHSAA to Support Legislation to Put Student Rights Over the FHSAA's Power

Concerned Floridians & Parents Call on Association to Support Legislation to Safeguard Rights & Opportunities for Student Athletes

Tallahassee, Fla. – The Access for Student Athletes Coalition, a new initiative launched by Floridians for Government Accountability, Inc., today called on the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA) to support Senate Bill 1164, sponsored by Senator Kelli Stargel (R-Lakeland), and House Bill 1279, sponsored by Representative Larry Metz (R-Yalaha). The proposals address the many concerns regarding the overreach and arbitrary scope of authority displayed by FHSAA representatives when conducting investigations on student eligibility to participate in local-area public school athletic programs. The proposals seek to put student rights above the FHSAA's power and establish true due process for student athletes during their limited window of eligibility.

“Current law and this new legislation would not allow for illegal recruiting, nor for wholesale free agency, as the FHSAA claims,” said Senator Stargel. “This proposal would not prevent the FHSAA from fulfilling their primary role; however, it would help combat their predisposition to consider students as guilty until proven innocent, and would establish true due process and rights for student athletes, which the current system of conducting investigations clearly lacks.”

“The FHSAA's claims are consistently about their organization, but our job is to speak for the students and parents, and stand up against unfair practices and sanctioned bullying,” said Jim Hart, chairman of Floridians for Government Accountability, Inc. “Parents across the state should stand behind the proposal by Representative Metz and Senator Stargel that will inject fairness and a stronger foundation for student rights when it comes to the process of determining whether any violation has occurred.”

The legislation, as filed by Senator Stargel and Representative Metz, would make necessary changes to protect parent and student rights when it comes to athletic participation at local public schools. The legislation would establish, and significantly expedite, due process during investigations conducted by the FHSAA and end the predisposition of FHSAA investigators to quickly assume that actions by student athletes are in furtherance of cross-school recruiting. The legislation would require the FHSAA to provide for investigation expenses, require the FHSAA to demonstrate convincing evidence of a student's violation, as well as require an independent, administrative law judge to issue the final order on whether or not a student remains eligible.

“High school sports are a very important part of education and the overall high school experience for kids. Sports are the very reason many students stay in school and keep their grades up. Since introducing this bill, we

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have heard from parents and students alike, thanking us for standing up to an organization that is more interested in protecting their power than protecting the student athletes whose lives are better because of the sports they play,” said Senator Stargel.

“Parents will make their voices heard in support of this legislation that would keep investigations to a reasonable timeframe, while allowing the FHSAA enough time to determine if violations have occurred. Instead of opening the floodgates for recruiting of high school athletes, as many may claim, this proposal simply establishes that students will be presumed innocent until proven guilty. This is a basic right of all citizens, so why do we not allow for this to be extended to our high school students as well?” concluded Hart.

For more information on the Access for Student Athletes Coalition, please visit <http://bit.ly/ZKdCOg> or ‘Like’ us on Facebook at <http://on.fb.me/WTNJfX>.

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