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News From The Senate Democrats

RUIZ & DIEGNAN BILL EXPANDING STUDENT ATHLETE HEAD INJURY SAFETY PROGRAM CLEARS COMMITTEE

Adds Intramural Sports Athletes to those who must be evaluated by Health Care Professional

TRENTON - Legislation sponsored by Senator M. Teresa Ruiz and Senator Patrick J. Diegnan Jr. that would require students participating in intramural sports programs organized by the school to be included in the student-athlete head injury safety program and to be evaluated by a licensed health care professional before returning to play was approved today by the Senate Education Committee.

"A young athlete suspected of suffering a concussion or head injury in a school-sponsored practice or game should be removed from competition and should not be permitted to return until he or she is evaluated by a health care provider. This is critical to ensuring that the injured student is safe and healthy," said Senator Ruiz.

New Jersey has one of the strictest concussion laws in the country. Under current law, students who participate in interscholastic sports programs or cheerleading programs who sustain or are suspected of having sustained a concussion or other head injury while engaged in a sports competition or practice must be immediately removed from the competition or practice and may not return until evaluated and cleared by a physician. Now, the program must be completed by school physicians, coaches, and athletic trainers involved in public or nonpublic school interscholastic sports programs and cheerleading programs.

The bill, S-2348, amends current law by expanding the categories to include student athletes who participate in intramural sports programs organized by the school in the student-athlete head injury safety program and adds that the coaches of intramural sports programs must also complete the safety training program.

"Updating our laws to protect all our student athletes during their sporting competition activities within the schools is common sense. Students who suffer concussions may appear to be fine the next day, but this bill will make sure that their health is evaluated before returning to school," said Senator Diegnan.

According to a study by the Center for Injury Research and Policy (CIRP) of The Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital, concussions represent nearly 10 percent of all high school athletic injuries. These injuries greatly impact a concussed student's ability to concentrate, learn, memorize and process information while in classroom settings.

The bill was approved with a vote of 4-0 and now heads to the full Senate for further consideration.
