

Feb 19, 2025

House Committee on Economic Development, Small  
Business and Trade

Written testimony of Christina Mazzola in Opposition to HB 3140

Chair Nguyen and members of the Committee, I am Christina Mazzola and I grew up in Portland. I am currently hospitalized or I would have been at the hearing today. As a teen, I excelled at tennis and became a high school tennis standout. To bolster my development as an athlete, my family joined a private athletic club in the greater Portland area where I was able to participate in tennis coaching and competition through the club.

Soon after I joined the club, an adult male who was a former collegiate tennis star was hired as their new tennis coach. Eager to continue to advance my tennis skills, I jumped at the chance to be trained under the Coach. I will refer to him as “Coach.”

Coach immediately gave me special attention. He spent extra time with me at practice and focused on me during group lessons. But our coach-athlete relationship quickly turned inappropriate. He began complimenting my appearance and bought alcohol for me and my underage friends. During our training sessions, he became more physical with me. He would physically touch and hold my arms and body under the guise of showing me how to hit a particular shot.

Coach found opportunities during sports-related events to get me alone and proceeded to abuse me on multiple occasions (kissing, groping and more). The abuse started when I was 17 and lasted into early adulthood.

I was extremely uncomfortable about what was happening but wasn't sure how to tell him to stop. I didn't know how to confront him and was worried that no one would believe me if I exposed him. Coach told me I shouldn't tell anyone because he would get fired and would no longer be able to coach me. Of course, at the time, I had no idea this is grooming, what a sexual abuser does to his victims. So I stayed silent, afraid that losing my Coach would derail my dreams of playing tennis in college while studying medicine and I was worried that the tight-knit tennis community would ostracize me.

As a result of the sexual abuse, I suffered guilt, self-blame, self-doubt, depression, fear, trust issues, and other emotional and physical challenges. Still, despite the sexual abuse I suffered, I have done my best to build a life for myself. After high school, I successfully completed both an undergraduate degree and a master's degree in teaching. I have worked as an educator and administrator for over three decades – part of a personal effort to help other students stay safer.

I am passionate about protecting youth in sporting and athletic programs from sexual abuse. While criminal cases can punish individual perpetrators, only civil lawsuits serve to hold organizations accountable for their negligence allowing abusers to prey on innocent victims often women and children. Civil lawsuits provide a mechanism for uncovering the truth about what a sports organization knew about a danger of abuse and what they did (or did not do) in response to that danger. Those mechanisms create powerful incentives for sporting organizations to take effective action to prevent abuse.

The sexual abuse I endured by a trusted coach arose out of my participation in a sport activity. When I heard about HB 3140, I couldn't remain silent. I cannot sit back silently while the members of this body determine whether someone like me has the right to hold the person/organizations responsible for my sexual abuse or give a FREE PASS, blanket immunity, to the negligent bad actors.

This bill would cut off our rights to seek answers and justice. It would not allow us our constitutional right to have a jury of our peers hear the facts of the case and decide justice on a case by case basis. Instead, it would give blanket immunity to bad actors, a FREE PASS for their negligence. It would allow organizations to keep their secrets about sexual abuse of athletes, shield them from compensating innocent victims, and result in more sexual abuse of participants in sports, fitness, and recreational activities.

On behalf of myself and other victims of sexual assault and abuse by coaches, team doctors and other trusted professionals in sports, I urge you to vote **NO on HB 3140** and ensure that operators of sports, fitness, and recreational activities continue to be accountable for negligence that enables sexual abuse of athletes.