

Greetings:

My name is Dr. Leslie D. Hannah. My day job is as an education professional. However, I have also been a professional umpire for many years, currently entering my 44th year. I also serve as a deputy commissioner for USA Softball in northeastern Oklahoma. I often come to Kansas to assist due to the shortage of umpires. Additionally, I lived in Kansas for a while and umpired with some of the best here.

I am writing you today in support of this bill. It needs to be passed. As noted, I am entering my 44th year as a professional umpire. I officiate games from the T-ball to College levels. I went many years without ejecting anyone; however, in the past six years I have ejected 117 people – mostly spectators.

I have kept statistics since I first noticed the shifting behaviors of people at sporting events, both youth and adult. It seems the parents at youth events are the worst.

This past year (2022) I received thirty-one death threats, had to be police escorted off the ball field sixteen times, received three police escorts out of town.

In the six years mentioned, I have had knives pulled on me, been threatened with bats, been shoved or “chest bumped” dozens of times. Parents have blocked my path and stopped me outside the field and cursed me mercilessly. One of the worst incidents, which happened in Kansas, was when a grandfather stopped me after a heated game to curse me and then he set his dog on me. The dog did attack. I was the plate umpire for that game and still had on my plate gear, which included steel-toed shoes and shin guards, so I was not harmed. However, the fact remains, the man set his dog to attack me.

Umpire numbers are at the lowest point I have ever seen. The average age of umpires in my area is 57. There is no “young blood” coming up. If a new, young umpire lasts two years that is an eternity. Older umpires are retiring, and many are citing the maltreatment as a major contributing factor. No one is coming up to replace them. If it continues at this pace, I predict there will be so few youth sports officials in three to five years that seasons will be cancelled. Please do your part and pass this bill to help protect sports officials. Without us, there is no game.

Sincerely,

Dr. Leslie D. Hannah