



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Senator Kennedy Vows to Sack Proposed Youth Football Ban

Timothy M. Kennedy

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Kennedy wants downstate Assembly member to withdraw legislation to ban youth football.

WNY youth football players and coaches join Kennedy to rally against proposed youth football prohibition.

Kennedy: Buffalo is a football city, and youth football is a part of our history. It's about more than just the X's and O's. It teaches qualities like discipline, leadership and teamwork - those lessons last a lifetime.

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, is fighting to block a proposed statewide ban on youth football. Kennedy and youth sports advocates gathered together Thursday outside Johnnie B. Wiley Stadium in Buffalo to rally against legislation introduced in the State Assembly to prohibit children under age 11 from playing football. Kennedy is urging the downstate lawmaker who proposed the tackle football ban to withdraw the legislation from consideration.

“Buffalo is a football city, and youth football is a part of our community’s history with proud tradition of teaching kids more than just the X's and O's. Character-building qualities such as discipline, leadership and teamwork are instilled at a young age – and they last a lifetime,” said Senator Kennedy. “We must always keep children’s safety in mind, but banning youth football is not the right approach. By restructuring practices and focusing on teaching the fundamentals, we can protect our children while still allowing them to take part in activities, like organized football, that help build character and keep them active.”

Kennedy understands critics’ concerns related to player safety, but he says there are plenty of ways to keep our children safe while still allowing them to play the game. He feels that decisions regarding whether or not kids are allowed to play youth football should be left up to parents, not lawmakers. Kennedy supports efforts to reduce and limit the amount of contact that takes place during practice. According to youth football organizers, most teams allow six hours of practice per week. In order to prevent injuries, it is recommended that teams limit contact drills to just two hours or less each week.

Kennedy also thinks teams must re-examine the types of contact drills they include in practice and leagues must better train coaches.

“Lining kids up and letting them bang helmets is ineffective and dangerous.

Coaches know this, and better trained coaches spend more time and energy teaching younger players the basics and fundamentals of the game, like how to tackle appropriately,” Kennedy said. “This type of instruction, especially among young athletes, could drastically reduce the number of injuries not just in youth football, but also throughout each player’s career from Pop Warner to the pros.”

Kennedy highlighted the impact youth sports has made in boosting academic performance among local youth. In the Buffalo Public School system, chronic absenteeism is a lingering problem. Studies show that at the kindergarten level, 40 percent of students missed 18 or more days of school in 2010.

“Youth sports organizations, like the United Youth Football League in Buffalo, are not only teaching the basics of the game, but they’re also working with schools to ensure their players attend class daily and achieve academic success.” Kennedy said. “With the UYFL, if players fail to attend class, they are not allowed to practice or suit up on game day. Youth football helps keep kids in school and out of trouble, banning the sport could have negative consequences for local families.”

At the rally Thursday, Senator Kennedy was joined by several local coaches, parents and athletes who support the efforts to block the ban on youth football.

“Local youth need to have opportunities to stay active and learn important qualities like teamwork and discipline. That’s exactly what children get from organized youth football,” said **Demaris Johnson, director of Community Action Organization’s Sports Program, which oversees inner-city Buffalo football leagues.** “At CAO sports, we place a priority on academic performance and school attendance. Our young athletes don’t get to play, if they don’t go to school and try their hardest every day. If youth football is outlawed, it could really hurt our community. Children would lose the motivation to do well in school and miss out on early chances to build character at young ages. I’m grateful to have Senator Kennedy on our side fighting to block this ban on youth football.”

“It’s best to teach athletes the fundamentals of the game when they’re young,” said **Rich Robbins, head coach at Canisius High School and 2012 Buffalo Bills Coach of the Year.** “When you coach high school students, it is easy to tell which students played youth football and learned proper techniques and which students are new to the game and still need work. A ban on youth football would likely lead to

higher numbers of severe injuries at the high school level because athletes aren't properly instructed on best practices and sound tackling methods at a young age when the instruction can be ingrained in their play. By standing up to stop this bill to ban youth football, Senator Kennedy will help ensure young people have the opportunity to achieve their fullest athletic potential and learn the basics at the right ages."

"I learned the basics of the game at an early age because I had the opportunity to play youth football. The discipline, leadership and fundamentals I gained then helped set me on a path to achieve great things," said **Jeremy Kelley, a West Seneca West grad who just signed with the Indianapolis Colts**. "When you start playing football at a young age, you pick up the focus, motivation and work ethic to do well not just athletically, but also academically. I'm proud to stand with Senator Kennedy to fight against this youth football ban, so that other kids have the chance to get involved in youth football to learn the skills to succeed in school and on the field."

The bill to ban youth football was introduced earlier this month. It would prohibit children under age 11 from playing tackle football. [The legislation can be read by clicking this link](#). Kennedy wants the bill to be withdrawn from consideration.

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Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 63rd District, which is comprised of the towns of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.