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The Honorable Mike Doogan
Alaska House of Representatives
Alaska State Capitol, Rm 400
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Representative Doogan,

Thank you for introducing HB 15, an act relating to prevention and evaluation of and liability for concussions in student athletes.

The Alaska Brain Injury Network, Inc (ABIN) is a non-profit organization dedicated to Alaskans whose lives have been changed by brain injury. ABIN's eighteen member board represents all regions of Alaska and at least 50 percent are TBI survivors or family members. We fully support HB 15.

ABIN has become the leader in understanding the needs of Alaskans with brain injury. ABIN has heard from 800 Alaskans requesting brain injury services since 2007. In addition, ABIN has heard public testimony from hundreds of Alaskans from Anchorage, Juneau, Fairbanks, Kenai, Barrow, Nome, Kodiak, Dillingham, Bethel, Copper River Basin, Tok, Ketchikan, Sitka, Homer, and more.

There are an estimated 10,000 Alaskans who have experienced long-term difficulties from a moderate to severe brain injury. The number of Alaskans experiencing a concussion or Mild TBI (mTBI) who visit the emergency department is estimated at 3,000 per year. Concussion and brain injury need to be taken seriously. With proper diagnoses, management, and treatment, research shows 80-90 percent of people experiencing a concussion or mTBI will recover fully. HB 15 is vital to ensuring our youth athletes have the best chance of recovery after an injury. When a concussion is not properly managed, prolonged recovery or even death from a second impact may result.

The National Football League, National Hockey League, the United States Olympic teams, majority of collegiate teams, and most recently in many states, even high school and youth sports teams have protocols and guidelines for concussion identification and return to play. Many of the leagues also require a cognitive baseline which is the first step to providing the best data to assess for a concussion when symptoms appear. If an athlete is suspected of a concussion, the assessment guidelines and return to play protocol are in place for the safety of the athlete, as well as ensuring the team has the strongest players in the game. A player who is normally elite, but then suffers a concussion, may temporarily have difficulty making quick decisions, their speed and reaction time may be compromised, and they may clumsily handle the ball. This compromised state caused by the concussion may hinder the team, and more importantly may put the athlete at risk for serious, life-long disability. No one wants to see an athletic child or young adult become disabled due to a decision to keep a kid in the game for a win or because of lack of education of what concussion symptoms may look like.

HB 15 will ensure that coaches have a basic understanding of concussion, student athletes will begin to understand the seriousness of concussion on and off the field, and parents may begin to understand brain injury better as well. This legislation is an opportunity to improve the public's awareness of the seriousness of concussion and brain injury, and keep our student athletes safe.

The future of our state depends on the brains of the individuals that reside here. HB 15 is one tool to giving Alaska's youth the best opportunity to become community and business leaders as adults.

The Alaska Brain Injury Network appreciates your leadership in sponsoring this important legislation. You have our support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jill Hodges". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jill" and last name "Hodges" clearly distinguishable.

Jill Hodges
Executive Director