



MASSACHUSETTS
GENERAL HOSPITAL



MassGeneral Hospital
for Children™



HARVARD
MEDICAL SCHOOL

S. 796
SUPPOA

Pediatric Surgery
55 Fruit Street, Warren 11
Boston Massachusetts 02114

September 15, 2009

To The Hon. Jeffrey Sanchez, House Chair, and the Hon. Susan C. Fargo, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Public Health

Re: Senate Bill 796 "An act relating to safety regulations for school athletic programs"

My name is Caren Harris and I am a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner specializing in Pediatric Trauma. I work at Massachusetts General Hospital for Children, treating children and adolescents who have sustained traumatic injuries. I work in the inpatient hospital setting as well as in the Pediatric Trauma Clinic.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before the Joint committee on Public Health regarding Senate Bill 796, an act relating to safety regulation for school athletic programs.

This is an important topic pertaining to school athletes. Athletics present our young citizens with an opportunity for physical fitness, teach them about the spirit of competition, and provide them avenues for social connectedness. With sports participation, however, there comes a risk for injury. Injuries to the musculoskeletal system are usually obvious and generally straightforward in terms of recognition and rehabilitation. Injuries to the brain, however, can be a much more difficult issue.

The science of concussion is evolving and still there is much to be learned. What we do know is that concussions vary in intensity and duration. The adolescent athlete tends to take longer to recovery than their adult or college counterparts. Also, the negative effects from a concussion are measurable for some time after the symptoms that the athlete feels have subsided.

Coaches, trainers, athletes, and parents are all put in a position to make decisions when athletes are injured. A programmed educational system, as outlined in this bill, would help to educate all of those involved in school athletics to help prevent, recognize, and properly treat the athlete with a head injury.

I have seen in the Pediatric Trauma Clinic that often there is pressure felt by the athlete to return to competition as soon as possible after an injury. Signs of a concussion may be overt or subtle and the evaluation by a health care provider would help to tease out ongoing effects from the



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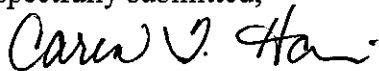
head injury. An evaluation by a health care provider is essential prior to return to play after sustaining a concussion. As concussions vary in severity and effect, so too do the recommendations for care after a concussion. The physician, nurse practitioner, or physician's assistant is in a uniquely neutral position regarding the return to play for these athletes. They can provide a thorough neurological evaluation and can provide guidance geared to the individual athlete.

Several years ago when I worked in primary care, I worked with a young athlete who had sustained a concussion diving for a ball while playing volleyball. She hit her chin on the floor and had dizziness, headache, and impairing fatigue that lasted for several weeks. She attempted to return to school without success within a couple of days of her injury. She could not follow what was happening in class and felt quite scared and confused as prior to her injury she had been an outstanding scholar athlete. She did not seek healthcare until two weeks after her injury. Had she been educated about head injuries as this bill recommends and evaluated sooner, she would have been pulled from school as well as athletics and been provided the appropriate support and recommendations. Perhaps, too, her symptoms would have abated sooner.

I am here to testify in support of this bill and on behalf of the young athletes of the Commonwealth. I would urge the members of this committee to support Bill SB792 and recommend its passage by the legislature.

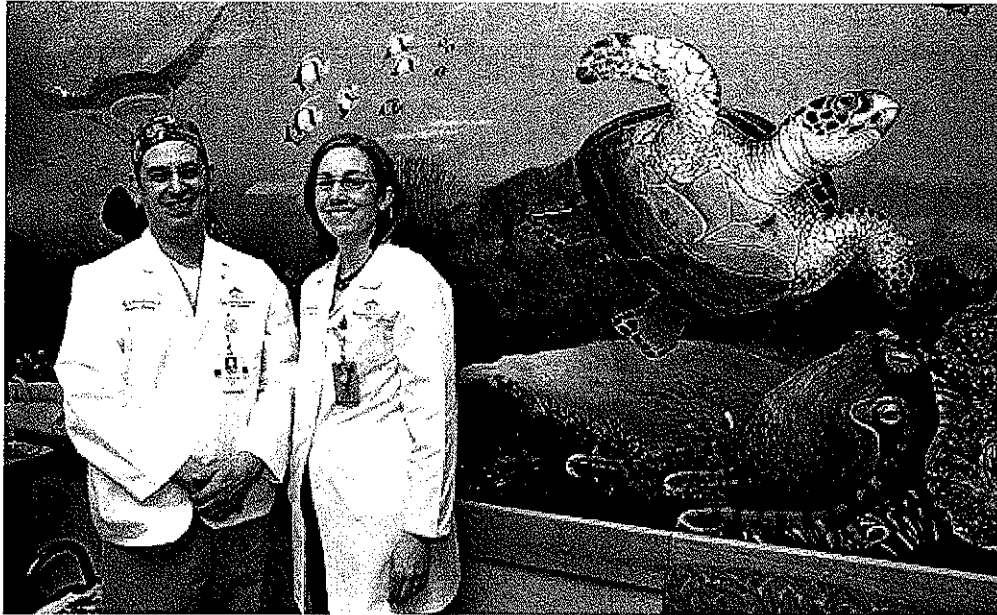
Thank you for your time.

Respectfully submitted,

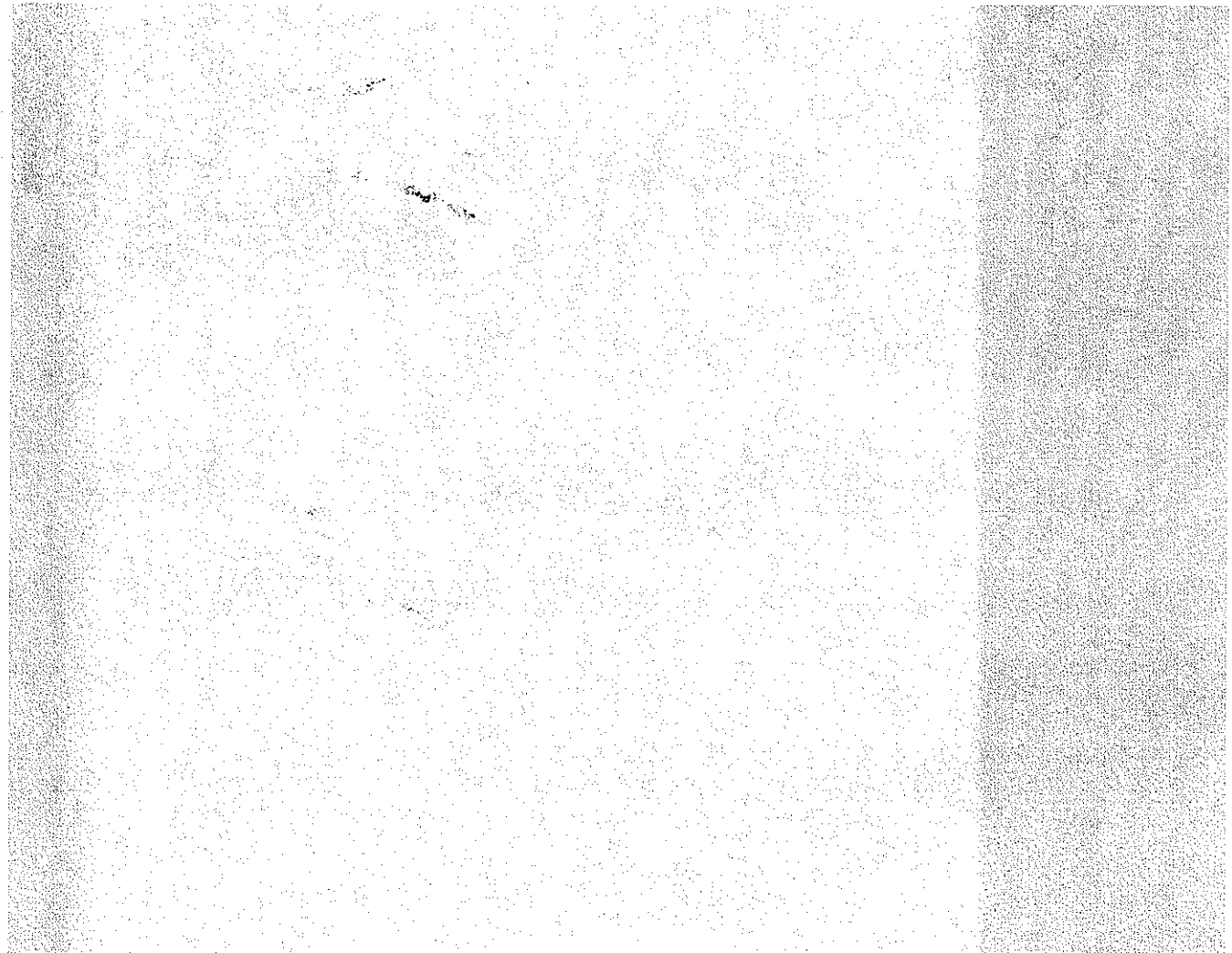


Caren T. Harris, MSN, PNP-BC
Pediatric Nurse Practitioner
Pediatric Trauma Program
MassGeneral Hospital *for* Children

"Caren is wonderful," says Sharon. "Before we went to see her, my daughter was on a rollercoaster ride. Not only did I really appreciate Caren's advice, but Megan's school also relied on her. With her help, we saw Megan's treatment finally go in the right direction."



DEPTH OF CARE: Masia (left), with Harris in an Emergency Department pediatric exam room





News

MGH Hotline 4.3.09 It was just another soccer tournament for 14-year-old Megan Lund, a freshman at Needham High School, as she played on a field in Florida this past fall.

Post-trauma treatment

New MGHfC Trauma Clinic coordinates recovery care

03/Apr/2009

It was just another soccer tournament for 14-year-old Megan Lund, a freshman at Needham High School, as she played on a field in Florida this past fall. The game was going well until the final two minutes when Megan knocked heads with the goalie and her head on the ground after falling back from the impact. Rushed to the emergency room, she was told she did not have a concussion. Still, she returned home to Massachusetts with a variety of ailments -- including headaches, dizziness and drowsiness. Her mother, Sharon, knew something wasn't right.

"We took her to our pediatrician, who prescribed pain medication," she says. "But that actually made her headaches worse, she wasn't able to go to school while on narcotics."

Sharon describes feeling helpless until she learned from a "soccer dad" about the Trauma Clinic at MassGeneral Hospital for Children (MGHfC). The clinic, which is open every Tuesday, treats pediatric patients experiencing post-trauma symptoms.

One phone call later, Megan was scheduled for an appointment with Caren Harris, PNP, the pediatric nurse practitioner who established the clinic with pediatric trauma surgeon Peter Masiakos, MD. The clinic-- the only one of its kind-- provides follow consultations to ensure proper healing.

"Sometimes if you dig deeper, you find out there's more going on," says Harris. "This clinic provides the opportunity to help identify any ongoing issues and works with the child and his or her parents to optimize recovery."

After examining Megan, Harris determined she had suffered a concussion. She scheduled several follow-up visits and reach out to Megan's school to help ensure she would not overtax herself and slow down her recovery.

The Trauma Clinic at MGHfC provides comprehensive evaluation and timely specialty referrals for children who have sustain traumatic injury and previously undergone evaluation and treatment in a hospital or ambulatory setting. Some injuries may require the involvement of multiple specialists-- from neurologists to physical therapists-- to ensure that each patient receives the best possible treatment plan for a quick, successful recovery.

Masiakos says the idea for the clinic stemmed from years of service as a pediatric trauma surgeon during which he found that many patients had no place to go for effective follow-up care after their initial surgery or treatment.

"I've seen a lot of kids who experienced traumatic injuries and were evaluated and released with no plan for return to a physician," he says. "I've heard parents say that after a severe head injury, their kids were not the same and that their school suffered. Caren and I envisioned the clinic providing services these kids weren't getting elsewhere."

The clinic is living up to its expectations. Today, Megan is back to her normal self, taking all of her regular classes and playing soccer.