

July 21, 2021 – NORTH CAROLINA LEGISLATURE AND HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

A proposal introduced in the North Carolina Legislature this week would remove the authority over public high school athletics from the North Carolina High School Athletic Association and place it under new, state-run commissions. The State Board of Education would establish and oversee student eligibility and a new NC Interscholastic Athletic Commission would administer sports contests.

Revised House Bill 91 was introduced Tuesday and it was passed this morning by the Senate Committee on Education. Other committees may have input on the bill before it reaches a vote by the State Senate. After that, HB91 would move to the full House of Representatives for approval before reaching the Governor's office.

During his presentations to the committees on Tuesday and Wednesday, Senator Todd Johnson (R-Union) noted he had expressed a desire to work with the staff of the NCHSAA to implement changes to the organization but was rebuffed numerous times.

The NCHSAA was created in 1913 in affiliation with the University of North Carolina System. From initial state championships in football and track & field, the organization began coordinating championships in other sports, establishing guidelines for officials (in conjunction with the WNCHSAA), coaches and more. Since 1973 the NCHSAA has been responsible for organizing conferences. Since 1977, when the Western North Carolina High School Activities Association disbanded, public high school athletic programs have played under the Association guidelines.

In 2010 the NCHSAA became an independent, non-profit corporation no longer affiliated with the university system.

Currently, the Association's Board of Directors establishes rules and regulations for athletic activities as allowed by the NCHSAA Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. The Board consists of 20 members which include the President, Vice President, Commissioner and the most recent past President along with 16 members elected by the Association. The 16 elected members must include coaches or athletic directors from each classification (A, AA, AAA, AAAA), high school principals from each classification and superintendents from school systems which include schools in each classification.

Board members are elected at annual meetings of the Association. Member schools (currently 427 schools) get one vote each.

The Commissioner and staff of the Association are responsible for implementing the directives of the Board.

During the Wednesday morning session of the Senate Committee on Education, NCHSAA Assistant Commissioner James Alverson asked the members to work with the Association to improve what they do in NC high athletics. He also spoke about the \$41 million in assets controlled by the Association which Alverson broke down into three general groups:

Restricted funds from donors for specific uses: \$15.8 million.

Board-designated endowment fund: \$10.7 million (-\$4 million recently returned to member schools).

Un-designated funds: \$13.9 million including 2 years of operating reserves and investments for program reserves.

Among the changes included in HB 91:

- The NCHSAA would operate through the 2021-22 school year IF the Association and the governmental entities can reach a 'memorandum of understanding' by August 15, 2021. The new commissions would assume control in the fall of 2022.
- If an MOU is not agreed upon, the NC Department of Public Instruction would assume control of high school athletics immediately.
- Student eligibility for athletic participation and player health and safety would be the responsibility of the State Board of Education.
- Game play, scheduling, classifications, officiating and other related issues would be the responsibility of the new Interscholastic Athletic Commission.
- The current board of School Superintendents, Principals, Athletic Directors and Coaches chosen by the member schools would be replaced by a commission of School Superintendents, Principals, Athletic Directors and Coaches appointed by the Governor (9 members), Speaker of the State House (4 members) and President Pro-Tem of the State Senate (4 members).
- Appeals over rulings made against programs would be made to an appeals board separate from the committee who issued the original ruling.
- The commission would be funded by fees and a percentage of gate receipts from state playoff games.
- The commission would hire a director and staff.
- The commission would not delegate authority to a director.
- The commission would not administer or distribute grants to schools or scholarships to players.
- The commission would not control the audio or video rights for games.
- Revised HB 91 authorizes the continuation of a study on allowing home schooled students to participate in athletics in public schools.