

Hood Bills On Referee Assaults Sees Tweaks, Reported From Committee

[Sen. Morris Hood III](#) on Tuesday won bipartisan support on a pair of bills making it a crime to assault a sports referee or official with some changes made to the bill as originally proposed.

"I'm pleased to see the bipartisan support to approve the bills today. These bills will make our sporting events safer, and will encourage people to respect the game. That's what John Bieniewicz would want," Mr. Hood said in a statement following his bills, [SB 31](#) and [SB 32](#), being reported from the Senate Judiciary Committee on a 3-1 vote.

The bills came in response to the death of Mr. Bieniewicz, who was officiating a soccer game when a player fatally punched him as the player was about to be ejected from the game.

[Sen. Steve Bieda](#) (D-Warren) proposed an S-1 substitute, adopted nearly unanimously by the committee, which makes some significant changes to the bill. Rather than making the assault, battery, or assault and battery of an official a felony, it instead makes the attack a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment for no more than one year, instead of three years, or a fine of \$1,000, instead of \$10,000, or both.

Those penalties in SB 31 can be prescribed for the assault, battery or assault and battery of an official immediately before, during or after a sporting event. They may also be permissible "at any other time" if the crime "directly arises from the sports official's execution of his or her duty as a sports official," the new language states.

The fines in SB 31 increase, though, if bodily injury requiring medical attention or medical care arises from the assault, battery or assault and battery of a sports official. In the new substitute, that is a felony punishable by imprisonment for no more than two years or a fine of no more than \$2,000, or both.

And if the crime causes the individual "serious impairment of a bodily function," that is a felony punishable by imprisonment for no more than five years or a fine of no less than \$1,000 or more than \$5,000, or both.

SB 32, its companion legislation, updates the code of criminal procedure to reflect the changes in SB 31.

[Sen. Patrick Colbeck](#) (R-Canton Township) spoke in opposition to the substitutes and reporting the bills from committee at all.

"Since when did Lady Justice not have blindfold on?" he commented to the committee prior to voting, adding that judges he had talked to said these bills would "hamstring" them and make the court uneven in terms of a fair and impartial trial. "We should be treating all people equal regardless of their profession."

But [Sen. Rick Jones](#) (R-Grand Ledge) shot back to Mr. Colbeck's comments, "When you attack a referee, you're inviting a riot. A riot can cause multiple injuries and multiple deaths. We see this all the time in different countries and ... that's why I think this is appropriate legislation."

The substitutes were adopted on a 4-1 vote, with Mr. Colbeck in opposition, and the bills were reported 3-1, with Mr. Colbeck in opposition and [Sen. Tory Rocca](#) (R-Sterling Heights) abstaining from voting.