

LC002768

**IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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RELATING TO EDUCATION -- STUDENT ACCESS TO INTERSCHOLASTIC  
ATHLETICS, "THE VERA RILEY ACT"

Referred To: House Education

1 SECTION 1. Legislative findings.

2 (1) Participation in interscholastic athletics provides essential educational, social, and

3 developmental benefits to students;

4 (2) Certain students enrolled in independent, charter, or alternative schools are denied

5 access to interscholastic athletic programs solely because their school does not offer the sport in

6 question;

7 (3) The state has a compelling interest in ensuring equitable access to public educational

8 opportunities and extracurricular programs supported by public resources;

9 (4) The current structure of athletic governance creates unequal access, disproportionately

10 affecting students enrolled in small or non-traditional schools, particularly female students;

11 (5) This act shall be known and may be cited as “The Vera Riley Act,” in recognition of a

12 Rhode Island student whose exclusion from school-based athletics highlighted this systemic issue.

13 SECTION 2. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by

14 adding thereto the following chapter:

15 CHAPTER 117

16 STUDENT ACCESS TO INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS, "THE VERA RILEY ACT"

17 **16-117-1. Eligibility for interscholastic athletic participation.**

18 (a) Any student enrolled in a Rhode Island middle school, grades six (6) through eight (8),

1 that is a recognized non-public, charter, or alternative education institution and that does not  
2 sponsor or participate in a particular interscholastic sport, shall be permitted to participate in that  
3 sport at the public middle school in the school district where the student resides; provided that:

4 (1) The student meets all applicable academic and conduct eligibility requirements;

5 (2) The student's non-sponsoring school verifies, in writing, that the sport is not offered;  
6 and

7 (3) The public school principal approves the participation for administrative coordination  
8 purposes.

9 (b) No student shall be denied access to a public school interscholastic athletic program on  
10 the sole basis of their enrollment at a non-sponsoring middle school; provided that, the conditions  
11 of subsection (a) of this section are satisfied.

12 (c) Nothing in this section shall be construed to require a public school to create, expand,  
13 or alter its interscholastic athletic programs or team structures, but public schools are encouraged  
14 to provide reasonable access to eligible students pursuant to the provisions of this chapter.

15 **16-117-2. Rulemaking authority.**

16 The department of education, in consultation with the Rhode Island interscholastic league  
17 (RIIL), shall promulgate rules and guidelines consistent with the provisions of this chapter to ensure  
18 timely implementation and nondiscriminatory access.

19 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
A N A C T  
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- STUDENT ACCESS TO INTERSCHOLASTIC  
ATHLETICS, "THE VERA RILEY ACT"

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1           This act requires all Rhode Island public middle schools, grades six (6) through eight (8),  
2   to allow any student from a recognized non-public, charter, or alternative education institution that  
3   does not sponsor or participate in a particular interscholastic sport, to participate in that sport in the  
4   school district where the student resides.

5           This act would take effect upon passage.

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