

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
Senator Thomas Umberg, Chair
2025-2026 Regular Session

AB 708 (Valencia)
Version: March 27, 2025
Hearing Date: June 24, 2025
Fiscal: No
Urgency: No
AM

SUBJECT

California Youth Football Act: safety equipment

DIGEST

This bill requires a youth tackle football league, youth sports organization that conducts a tackle football program, or coach of a youth sports organization to allow youth tackle football participants to use safety equipment, including soft-shelled add-ons on football helmets. The bill authorizes a court to grant a temporary restraining order, preliminary injunction, or permanent injunction to remedy a violation or threatened violation, and provides that a prevailing plaintiff is entitled to an award of reasonable attorney's fees and costs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a growing body of research surrounding the potential dangers of contact sports and concussions, as well as public interest around this issue due largely to the National Football League's (NFL) \$1 billion settlement of concussion-related lawsuits. After years of testing and research, the NFL has mandated the use of soft-shell helmet covers during post- and pre-season games. According to the author, some California youth football organizations ban or prohibit the use of soft shell caps even when parents prefer their child use this safety equipment. This bill seeks to ensure that youth tackle football players can use similar protective equipment.

The bill is author-sponsored. The bill is supported by the California Academy of Family Physicians, the California Medical Association, the California Neurology Society, the California Orthopedic Association, the Concussion Legacy Foundation, and the National Cheer Safety Foundation. The Committee did not receive any timely opposition. This bill passed the Senate Health Committee with a vote of 9 to 0.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE LAW

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Youth Football Act to provide statewide safety standards for youth football. (Health and Saf. Code §§ 124240 et seq.)
- 2) Requires a youth sports organization that conducts a tackle football program to comply with all of the following requirements:
 - a) a tackle football team cannot conduct more than two full-contact practices per week during the preseason and regular season;
 - b) a tackle football team cannot hold a full-contact practice during the off-season;
 - c) the full-contact portion of a practice cannot exceed 30 minutes in any single day;
 - d) all coaches must receive a tackling and blocking certification from a nationally recognized program that emphasizes shoulder tackling, safe contact and blocking drills, and techniques designed to minimize the risk during contact by removing the involvement of youth tackle football participant's head from all tackling and blocking techniques;
 - e) all coaches, administrators, and referees must annually complete concussion protocol training, review an opioid use fact sheet, and receive training related to heat-related illnesses;
 - f) all coaches receive first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and automated external defibrillator (AED) certification;
 - g) each parent or guardian must be provided information related to concussions and opioid use;
 - h) all football helmets must be reconditioned and recertified every other year, unless stated otherwise by the manufacturer;
 - i) a minimum of one certified emergency medical technician, state-licensed paramedic, or higher-level licensed medical professional is present during all preseason, regular season, and postseason games;
 - j) at least one independent nonrostered individual, appointed by the youth sports organization, is present at all practice locations;
 - k) all safety equipment is inspected before every game; and
 - l) all youth tackle football participants complete a minimum of 10 hours of noncontact practice at the beginning of each season for the purpose of conditioning, acclimating to safety equipment, and progressing to the introduction of full-contact practice. (Health and Saf. Code § 124241.)
- 3) Provides that nothing in 2), above, prohibits any youth sports organization or youth tackle football league from adopting and enforcing rules intended to provide a higher standard of safety for youth tackle football participants than those set forth in statute. (Health and Saf. Code § 124243.)

- 4) Enacts the Navaeh Youth Sports Safety Act to require a youth sports organization that elects to offer an athletic program to ensure that by January 1, 2027, its athletes have access to an AED during any official practice or match. (Health & Saf. Code §§ 124238 et seq.)
- 5) Provides that an injunction is a writ or order requiring a person to refrain from a particular act. (Code of Civ. Proc. § 525.)
- 6) Provides that an injunction is to be granted in certain circumstances, including when it appears by the complaint that the plaintiff is entitled to the relief demanded, and the relief, or any part thereof, consists in restraining the commission or continuance of the act complained of, either for a limited period or perpetually. (Code of Civ. Proc. § 526(a).)
- 7) Authorizes a preliminary injunction to be granted at any time before judgment upon a verified complaint, or upon affidavits if the complaint in the one case, or the affidavits in the other, show satisfactorily that sufficient grounds exist therefor, except that no preliminary injunction can be granted without notice to the opposing party. (Code of Civ. Proc. § 527(a).)
- 8) Permits a temporary restraining order or a preliminary injunction, or both, to be granted in a class action, in which one or more of the parties sues or defends for the benefit of numerous parties upon the same grounds as in other actions, whether or not the class has been certified. (*Id.* at subd. (b).)

This bill:

- 1) Requires a youth tackle football league, youth sports organization that conducts a tackle football program, or coach of a youth sports organization to allow youth tackle football participants to use safety equipment, including soft-shelled add-ons on football helmets.
- 2) Authorizes a court to grant a temporary restraining order, preliminary injunction, or permanent injunction to remedy a violation or threatened violation of 1), above.
- 3) Provides that a prevailing plaintiff who obtains a temporary restraining order, preliminary injunction, or permanent injunction to remedy a violation or threatened violation of 1), above, is entitled to an award of reasonable attorney's fees and costs.

COMMENTS

1. Stated need for the bill

The author writes:

AB 708 safeguards parents' rights to decide on soft-shell helmet add-ons for their children in youth football leagues, allowing them to make informed decisions about player safety. At a critical stage of brain development, it is essential to protect young athletes' long-term well-being while upholding the integrity of the sport. This bill ensures that families have the freedom to equip their children with additional safety measures, aligning youth football protections with those used at the professional level in the National Football League.

2. Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE)

Over the past twenty years or so, research has demonstrated a link between repeated impacts of the head with a risk of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE). The Senate Health Committee states that "CTE is a neurodegenerative disease associated with exposure to contact and collision sports (CCS), including football, boxing, soccer, rugby, and ice hockey. Like most neurodegenerative diseases, CTE only can be definitively diagnosed by postmortem neuropathological examination, thus it is difficult to do definitive studies on the relationship between head injuries and sports given limited sample sizes."¹

The public has become more aware of CTE and its causes in the wake of the NFL's \$1 billion settlement of concussion-related lawsuits.² Because of this, the Legislature passed AB 1 (Cooper, Ch. 158, Stats. 2019), which enacted the California Youth Football Act to provide statewide safety standards for youth football organizations. According to the Senate Health Committee:

In March 2022, the NFL passed a mandate and began requiring offensive and defensive linemen, tight ends, and linebackers to wear Guardian Caps during every preseason practice between the start of training camp and the second preseason game. In 2024, the NFL expanded this mandate to include all positions, with the option for quarterback, kicker, and punter, and also began allowing the use of Guardian Caps for regular season in-game use. According to the Guardian Cap company, in the 2024 season, 19 NFL players from different teams wore Guardian Caps during games. Over the years, a number of different companies have

¹ Sen. Health Comm. analysis of AB 708 (2025-26 reg. sess.) as amended Mar. 27, 2025 at p. 3.

² Lawrence Hurley, *Supreme Court ends fight over \$1 billion NFL concussion deal*, Reuters, (Dec. 12, 2016), available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/supreme-court-ends-fight-over-1-billion-nfl-concussion-deal-idUSKBN1411O0/>.

developed soft-shell helmet covers, including the SAFR Football Helmet Cover, and GameBreaker.³

Some organizations may be banning the use of these add-on soft-shell caps due to the fact that the addition of them to the helmet may alter the warranty of the helmets. For example, in 2013 the Colorado High School Activities Associations banned the use of Guardian Caps or other add-ons to helmets over fears of voiding any legal defense against helmet manufacturers for potential injuries.⁴ The National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE) released a statement in 2024 regarding add-on helmet products stating:

Products designed to be added to a football helmet are being marketed and sold; some are intended to measure impacts, while others are expressly marketed as improving a helmet's performance. Some products claim the ability to protect against concussions. Regardless of the truth of such claims, the addition of those products to a certified helmet changes the model, by definition, under the NOCSAE standards.⁵

This bill seeks to prohibit youth tackle football organizations from banning the use of safety equipment. The bill provides a mechanism for parents or guardians to seek injunctive relief to remedy a violation of this prohibition or threatened violation of this prohibition. As it can be costly to bring such a suit, the bill provides that a prevailing plaintiff is entitled to reasonable attorney's fees and costs.

3. Statements in support

The California Medical Association (CMA), a supporter of the bill, writes:

CMA supports increased awareness and education on traumatic brain injuries among those participating in at risk sports, such as tackle football. Allowing and encouraging the use of safety equipment while engaging in these activities is a common-sense approach to reduce risks. No youth tackle football program should prohibit young players from wearing protective gear designed to keep them safe and this bill will end this concerning practice.

³ Sen. Health Comm. analysis of AB 708 (2025-26 reg. sess.) as amended Mar. 27, 2025 at pp. 2-3.

⁴ Adrian Dater, *Guardian Cap: controversial ruling may mean end to use in Colorado*, the Denver Post, (updated Apr. 29, 2016.), available at <https://www.denverpost.com/2013/07/31/guardian-cap-controversial-ruling-may-mean-end-to-use-in-colorado/>.

⁵ *Certification to NOCSAE Standards and Add-on Helmet Products*, NOCSAE, (May 22, 2024), available at <https://nocsae.org/certification-to-nocsae-standards-and-add-on-helmet-products-2/#>.

SUPPORT

California Academy of Family Physicians
California Medical Association
California Neurology Society
California Orthopedic Association
Concussion Legacy Foundation
National Cheer Safety Foundation

OPPOSITION

None received

RELATED LEGISLATION

Pending Legislation: None known.

Prior Legislation:

AB 3047 (McCarty, 2024) would have required the California Surgeon General to convene a Commission on Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) and Youth Football to investigate issues related to the risks of brain injury associated with participation in youth football, and issue recommendations on the minimum age for tackle football and best practices for minimizing the risk of concussion and CTE. AB 3047 was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 734 (McCarty, 2023), would have prohibited youth tackle football leagues, and youth sports organizations that conduct tackle football programs, from allowing the participation of any person younger than six years of age. AB 734 was not taken up on the Assembly Floor.

AB 1467 (Alanis, Ch. 24, Stats. 2023) enacted the Navaeh Youth Sports Safety Act to require a youth sports organization that elects to offer an athletic program to ensure that by January 1, 2027, its athletes have access to an AED during any official practice or match.

AB 1348 (McCarty, 2022) was substantially similar to AB 3047 of 2024. AB 1348 was vetoed by Governor Newsom who stated in his veto message that “[t]he effectiveness of these recently implemented safety measures [AB 1 below] has not been sufficiently assessed. More research is needed to better understand current safety measures and the risks. Furthermore, this bill would require more than \$2 million to implement, which was not accounted for in the budget.”

AB 1 (Cooper, Ch. 158, Stats. 2019) enacted the California Youth Football Act.

PRIOR VOTES

Senate Health Committee (Ayes 9, Noes 0)

Assembly Floor (Ayes 74, Noes 0)

Assembly Judiciary Committee (Ayes 12, Noes 0)

Assembly Arts, Entertainment, Sports, and Tourism Committee (Ayes 9, Noes 0)
