

ALABAMA COMMISSION ON YOUTH SPORTS

A WHITE PAPER PROPOSAL FOR THE STATE OF ALABAMA

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Executive Summary

Alabama has long been a national leader in youth sports. From Friday night football under the lights in every corner of the state to the legacy of legendary coaches and athletes, sports are woven into the fabric of Alabama's identity. Alabama was also the first state in the nation to mandate safety training for youth coaches through the Coach Safely Act, signed into law in 2018—a pioneering piece of legislation that has since been replicated or introduced in multiple states, including Arkansas, Tennessee, Georgia, Texas, Louisiana, Indiana, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and others. [29, 31, 34]

Now is the time to build on that legacy. This white paper proposes establishing the Alabama Commission on Youth Sports—a governor-appointed body that would make Alabama the model state for youth sports governance, safety, access, and excellence. As state legislatures across the country address youth sports policy, the fiscal dimensions of governance require executive leadership. This commission would position the next Governor of Alabama, in the role of the state's top executive, to become the national leader on an issue that touches the lives of nearly every family in the state. [19, 20, 21, 22, 23]

Youth sports are an enormous economic force. U.S. families now spend more than \$40 billion annually on their children's sports activities, and the total economic impact of amateur and youth sports tourism reached \$91.8 billion in 2021, generating 635,000 jobs and \$12.9 billion in tax revenue nationally. [24, 26, 27] For Alabama, a state whose deep sports culture is a defining asset, the opportunity to capture a greater share of this economic activity—while simultaneously protecting its children—is compelling.

This proposal is presented by Dr. Darin W. White (of the Center for Sports Analytics at Samford University), in partnership with Dr. James R. Andrews (of the Andrews Research and Education Foundation), and Coach Jack Crowe (President of the CoachSafelySports Policy Institute and architect of Alabama's landmark Coach Safely Act).

I. Why This Matters: The Case for Action

A. The Economic Scale of Non-Interscholastic Youth Sports (Ages 14 and Under)

Youth sports in America are not just a pastime—it is a massive economic sector that rivals the revenues of major professional sports leagues. The data is striking:

- **National Family Spending:** U.S. families now spend more than \$40 billion annually on their children's sports activities, according to the Aspen Institute's 2025 analysis. The average family spent \$1,016 on their child's primary sport in 2024—a 46% increase since 2019—and an additional \$475 on the same child's other sports, for a total of nearly \$1,500 per child. The Aspen Institute's 2024 parent survey found that family costs ranged from nothing to nearly \$25,000, with travel sports and private training among the highest-cost categories. [26, 27]
- **Number of Alabama Families:** Alabama is home to approximately 730,000 children ages 5–14. Based on national participation rates showing approximately 55% of children

ages 6–17 participate in organized sports, an estimated 400,000 or more Alabama families have a child registered in organized youth sports. [46]

- **Total Economic Impact:** According to the Sports Events and Tourism Association, \$39.7 billion was spent directly on amateur and youth sports in 2021, generating a total economic impact (direct and indirect) of \$91.8 billion, creating 635,000 jobs, and producing \$12.9 billion in tax revenue for local economies. [24]
- **Global Market:** A 2024 Global Sports Insights report estimated U.S. youth sports spending at approximately \$43 billion in 2023, accounting for most of the estimated \$64.3 billion global youth sports market. [25]
- **Industry Description:** The Youth Sports Business Report characterized youth sports as a “\$54 billion industry” in its coverage of the Aspen Institute’s State of Play 2025 report. [28]
- **Alabama Context:** While comprehensive state-level youth sports economic data is limited, Alabama’s deep sports culture suggests significant economic activity. Based on approximately 400,000 Alabama children in organized sports and average national family spending of nearly \$1,500 per child, Alabama families spend an estimated \$600 million or more annually on youth sports participation costs alone—before accounting for equipment retail, facility fees, and sports tourism spending by visiting families, which would push the total considerably higher. The Aspen Institute’s State of Play Mobile County report found that access gaps exist—particularly for children with disabilities, with one-third of Alabama families who have a child with a disability reporting it is “very hard” to obtain recreational opportunities. [17, 30, 46]

The public health dividend is equally significant: a study published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine found that reaching the federal government’s target of 63% youth sports participation nationally could save the U.S. \$80 billion in direct medical costs and productivity losses while delivering over 1.8 million Quality Years of Life. [33]

B. Economic Development Opportunity for Executive Leadership

Youth sports represent a significant and largely untapped economic development opportunity for the State of Alabama, yet no state-level body exists to coordinate economic strategy, pursue federal funding, or ensure that the economic activity generated by youth sports benefits Alabama communities rather than out-of-state operators. The National Association of Realtors, representing over 1.5 million members, has identified youth sports facilities and programming as a strategic driver of community appeal and economic growth, featuring two Alabama communities—Hoover and Albertville—in its national reporting on youth sports tourism. [24, 49] The opportunity for executive leadership is clear and urgent.

- **The Proof of Concept Is Already in Alabama:** The Hoover Metropolitan Complex demonstrates what strategic youth sports investment can produce. Following \$105 million in investment over the past decade, the complex generated \$91.3 million in total economic impact in fiscal year 2024, attracted more than 770,000 visitors from nearly all 50 states, and posted \$1.3 million in operating profit—a rarity among municipal sports venues nationwide, which typically operate at a loss. Youth sports tourism was the only tourism sector to grow during the 2008 recession and the first to recover after the Covid-19 pandemic; the Hoover Met was among the first facilities nationally to resume operations in 2020 and experienced a smaller revenue decline than industry averages. But Hoover accomplished this on its own. Most Alabama communities lack the

resources, expertise, or scale to replicate this success without state-level coordination. [47, 51]

- **The Economic Value Is Flowing Out of State:** The National Recreation and Park Association reports that 5 in 6 park and recreation agencies work with outside partners—including private sports associations, school systems, and nonprofit organizations—to deliver youth sports programming. Many of these partners are private 501(c)(3) nonprofits or for-profit enterprises, some backed by private equity investors, that use government property and rely on the state's 60,000 non-interscholastic volunteer coaches to generate revenue that largely leaves Alabama. Online service providers that manage scheduling, registration, and payment processing for youth sports organizations also collect significant revenue from Alabama families. Congress has recognized this dynamic: the Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017 (S.534) explicitly classified youth sports as interstate commerce. Without a coordinating body at the state level, there is no mechanism to ensure that the economic activity generated on public property benefits the communities that provide the facilities, the coaches, and the children. [31, 35, 48]
- **Revenue and Tax Compliance:** A substantial share of youth sports commerce in Alabama is conducted by out-of-state operators that collect fees from Alabama families, sell equipment and apparel into the state, and generate revenue using publicly owned facilities. Alabama adopted an economic nexus standard in 2015 and has enforced it since October 1, 2018, following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *South Dakota v. Wayfair, Inc.* (2018), which eliminated the physical-presence requirement for state sales and use tax collection. Under Rule 810-6-2-.90.03, remote sellers with more than \$250,000 in retail sales into Alabama during the preceding calendar year are required to collect and remit Alabama tax, and the state directs such sellers to its Simplified Sellers Use Tax program. Marketplace facilitators exceeding the same threshold must either collect and remit or report those sales to the Department and notify customers. Whether, and to what extent, out-of-state youth sports operators, equipment and apparel vendors, and online platform providers are meeting these existing obligations to the Alabama Department of Revenue is not currently known, because no state entity tracks this sector. Determining the answer is precisely the kind of question a coordinating body is positioned to study. [53]
- **Federal Funding Is Becoming Available:** Congress has recognized the economic significance of youth sports. The bipartisan Youth Sports Facilities Act (S.1419/H.R.2850), introduced in April 2025 by Sen. Todd Young (R-IN), Sen. Jon Ossoff (D-GA), Rep. Bill Huizenga (R-MI), and Rep. Marc Veasey (D-TX), would make youth sports facilities eligible for Economic Development Administration (EDA) grants, with priority given to underserved and rural communities. When this funding becomes available, states with a coordinating body in place will be positioned to compete for it. States without one will not. [50]
- **The Window Is Closing:** The Aspen Institute reports declining youth sports participation nationally, driven by rising costs, barriers to access, and a youth attrition rate of approximately 35% annually. Every child who drops out of sports represents lost economic activity—fewer registrations, fewer tournaments, fewer hotel nights, fewer meals purchased. Without strategic intervention to reverse these trends, the economic engine that youth sports represents will shrink rather than grow. [17, 26]

A Commission on Youth Sports would provide the state-level assessment and policy coordination that is currently absent. It would evaluate the economic landscape, identify where

Alabama is losing value to out-of-state operators, recommend strategies to help communities capture the full economic benefit of youth sports activity, and position Alabama to compete for emerging federal funding—ensuring that the Governor and Legislature have the data and policy recommendations needed to act strategically on a multibillion-dollar sector that currently has no coordinating voice at the state level.

C. Statewide Supervisory Standards of Care

Alabama Code 22-11F recognizes youth sports as “High Risk.” The liability of negligence associated with youth sports activity conducted on public property—including city, county, and school facilities—can be meaningfully mitigated through the establishment of clear, statewide supervisory standards of care. When no standards are in place, immunity from claims of supervisory neglect is substantially more difficult to defend, particularly where known health and safety risks exist and training expectations are vague or inconsistent. This exposure has been compounded by significant instability in the youth sports liability insurance market—the number of carriers writing youth sports insurance has dropped from 30 to fewer than five in the past decade, with claim frequency and severity both increasing and some organizations facing 50% premium increases. [45]

The Coach Safely Act addresses this challenge through the creation of a defensible standard of care. Under Alabama Code § 22-11F-3(i) and (j), coaches and athletics personnel who complete the required injury-mitigation course and act in good faith, and in a manner consistent with generally accepted coaching and safety techniques, are granted specific civil liability immunity. This statutory structure illustrates how statewide training standards can align public-health interests with practical protections for volunteers and local governments. [34, 43]

National governing bodies of non-interscholastic youth sports promote guidelines for eligibility and rules of play, but lack consistent enforcement of standards. Meanwhile, the privatization of youth sports is a rapidly growing trend. These organizations function as community sports franchises involved in interstate commerce, generally without standards of care. Alabama has codified the activities of these organizations as “high risk” under Alabama Administrative Code, Rule 420-11-3-.01—a designation that underscores the need for consistent, statewide supervisory standards proportionate to the level of risk inherent in youth sports participation. [36]

D. Alabama’s Unique Position

Few states have a deeper connection to sports than Alabama. Athletics are central to the state’s culture, economy, and community identity. Yet outside of school-sponsored sports, the vast majority of youth sports programs in Alabama—and across the nation—operate with minimal coordinated oversight, inconsistent safety standards, and no single body responsible for assessing risk, access, or effectiveness at the statewide level.

Alabama already demonstrated national leadership with the Coach Safely Act. That law established the principle that coaches working with children 14 and under on public property must be trained in injury recognition and prevention. A 2025 report to the Alabama State Legislature documented that coaches have been trained in over 400 municipalities and all 67 counties, with approximately 13,000 coaches trained annually—representing 22% of the estimated 60,000 youth coaches statewide. This compliance was achieved through the joint work of the CoachSafely Foundation and the Alabama Recreation and Parks Association. [31]

In 2025, the Alabama Legislature strengthened this framework by amending the Coach Safely Act through Senate Bill 140, assigning formal oversight authority to the Alabama Department of Public Health and authorizing penalties for non-compliance. Together, these statutory actions positioned Alabama as the first state to integrate youth coach training, public-health oversight, and conditional civil-liability protections into a cohesive, statewide policy framework. [34]

A Commission on Youth Sports would allow Alabama to extend its leadership beyond coach education to address the full range of challenges now facing youth sports—including safety, access, governance, interstate commerce, and the economic and public-health consequences of a rapidly privatizing system. Rather than responding piecemeal to emerging issues, Alabama would possess a standing advisory body capable of proactive, data-driven assessment and coordinated policy guidance.

E. The National Landscape: Where States Stand

The movement toward state-level youth sports governance remains in its earliest stages. As of early 2026, only a limited number of states have taken formal action, creating a significant opportunity for Alabama to lead rather than follow.

- **States Modeling Youth Sports Legislation After Alabama:** Georgia, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, Florida, North Carolina, Louisiana, Indiana, and Pennsylvania have adopted or introduced legislation informed by Alabama’s Coach Safely Act. These states represent natural peers and potential early adopters of a broader youth sports governance model should Alabama establish a Commission on Youth Sports. [31]

Several states have begun experimenting with youth sports governance models, each reflecting different policy objectives and scopes:

- **Louisiana (2026):** The most direct adoption of the Alabama model to date. Senate Bill 260, signed into law on May 22, 2026 as Act No. 377, is expressly titled the “Coach Safely Act.” Building on Louisiana’s existing youth sports injury and concussion management laws, the Act conditions the limitation of civil liability for volunteer athletic coaches, managers, athletic trainers, team volunteer healthcare providers, and sports team officials on completion of either a safety orientation and training program established by their league or team, or a youth injury mitigation course approved by the Louisiana Department of Health. Approved courses must cover emergency preparedness, concussions and head trauma, heat and extreme weather injuries, musculoskeletal overuse, and sudden cardiac death. The Act passed unanimously in both chambers (33–0 in the Senate, 89–0 in the House). [52]
- **Illinois (August 2025):** The only state with a fully established, dedicated Commission on Youth Sports. Created by Public Act 104-0222 (HB 2418), this governor-appointed advisory body is housed within the Department of Human Services. Its membership includes legislative appointees and subject-matter experts in coaching, adaptive sports, youth development, equity, and parenting. Members serve two-year terms and report annually to the Governor and General Assembly. It passed with broad bipartisan support (109–0 in the House, 46–11 in the Senate). [19]

- **Massachusetts (2025):** Established a Youth Sports Commission (Bill S.1374) as a study commission charged with examining access, safety, and affordability. The commission's mandate is limited to research and recommendations and does not confer regulatory authority. [20]
- **California (October 2025):** Governor Newsom signed AB 749, the Youth Sports for All Act, creating a Blue Ribbon Commission tasked with studying the feasibility of establishing a centralized Department of Youth Sports. The California commission is time-limited and focused on evaluation rather than implementation. [22]
- **Minnesota (1987–present):** The Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission (MASC) is the longest-standing state body related to amateur sports. Its mission has historically emphasized sports tourism, facility development, and grant administration, rather than youth sports safety, public-health outcomes, or governance standards. [23]
- **Colorado (2024):** Enacted the Safer Youth Sports Act (SB24-113), one of the strongest regulatory youth sports laws in the nation, with comprehensive requirements related to safeguarding, reporting obligations, organizational compliance, and abuse prevention. [21]

The bottom line: Alabama would be the first state to formally integrate youth sports health and safety governance with explicit recognition of youth sports as a form of modern interstate commerce. Combined with the existing Coach Safety Act and public-health oversight structure, the proposed Commission would represent a uniquely comprehensive approach to youth sports governance at the state level.

F. The Health Data Demands Action

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has characterized youth sports injuries at epidemic proportions. The academic research is clear and convergent. These issues are present in Alabama and require coordinated attention:

- **Untrained Coaches:** Less than 30% of youth coaches have been trained in the past year. Coaches are going extended periods without being trained in CPR/basic first aid, concussion management, general safety and injury prevention, physical conditioning, sports skills and tactics, and effective motivational techniques. Approximately 4 in 10 coaches have never been trained in these areas. [37]
- **Preventable Injuries:** An estimated 8.6 million sports- and recreation-related injury episodes occurred annually in the United States between 2011 and 2014, according to the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics. More than 775,000 children ages 14 and under are treated in hospital emergency rooms for sports-related injuries annually, with 1 out of every 4 considered serious. An estimated 12 million individuals between the ages of 5 and 22 suffer a sport-related injury annually, leading to 20 million lost days of school and approximately \$33 billion in healthcare costs. At least 50% of youth sports injuries are overuse injuries. [2, 38, 39, 41]
- **Educational Impact:** Sports-related injuries among youth result in an estimated 20 million lost school days annually nationwide. Applied to Alabama's share of the youth population, this represents approximately 300,000 lost school days per year in the state—days that affect student attendance, academic performance, and school funding formulas tied to average daily attendance. Reducing preventable youth sports injuries

through coordinated safety standards has direct implications for educational outcomes and the fiscal health of Alabama's school systems. [41, 46]

- **Early Specialization Crisis:** The American Academy of Pediatrics (2024) documented the epidemic of overuse injuries, overtraining syndrome, and burnout caused by early single-sport specialization. ACL tears in children increased 12% in a single year (2021–2022). [1, 12]
- **Abuse and Misconduct:** The U.S. Center for SafeSport's 2024 survey found that approximately 1 in 5 minor student-athletes reported some form of sexual misconduct. 56% of youth sports organizations lack basic safety policies for adult-minor interactions. [7, 16]
- **Life-Threatening Emergencies:** Sudden cardiac arrest and heat illness remain leading causes of death among young athletes. The CDC identifies over 9,000 heat illness incidents annually among high school athletes alone. Emergency response training based on injury recognition is vital in youth sports for ages 14 and under, where medical personnel are not available, and especially in underserved communities. [4, 5, 15]
- **Mental Health:** Research shows 91% of athletes aged 16–17 experience sport-related stress. A national poll conducted by the American College of Sports Medicine and the National Youth Sports Health & Safety Institute found that 91% of Americans feel sports participation is important for children, yet 94% feel more needs to be done to ensure the health and safety of youth athletes. Burnout is a primary driver of attrition, with 35% of young athletes quitting each year. [1, 10, 11, 42]
- **Access and Equity:** Youth from low-income households and communities of color face significant barriers. The participation gap between low-income and high-income households widened to 20.2 percentage points in 2024. [17, 26]

II. The Proposal: Alabama Commission on Youth Sports

A. Mission Statement

The Alabama Commission on Youth Sports shall serve as the state's advisory and coordinating body to promote safe, equitable, accessible, and developmentally appropriate youth sports for all children in Alabama, and to provide oversight of the commerce of the youth sports industry in Alabama. The Commission shall gather data, evaluate community needs, and make recommendations to the Governor, the Alabama Legislature, and relevant state agencies concerning the health, safety, development, and well-being of young athletes, as well as the economic activity the youth sports industry generates across the state.

The Commission's role shall be advisory in nature and shall not include regulatory, enforcement, or revenue-raising authority.

B. Establishing Authority

The Commission can be established through one of two mechanisms:

1. **Executive Order by the Governor:** The fastest path, demonstrating decisive leadership. The Governor defines the commission's scope, membership, and reporting obligations.
2. **Legislative Act:** Provides more permanence and statutory authority, as Illinois did with Public Act 104-0222. This survives changes in gubernatorial administration and provides opportunity for bipartisan support.

Recommendation: A two-phase approach. The Governor issues an executive order to establish the commission immediately upon taking office, then works with legislative allies to codify it into state law during the first legislative session.

C. Fiscal Matters for Consideration

The Commission shall consider making recommendations concerning the following fiscal matters, subject to legislative authorization where applicable:

1. **Licensing Youth Sports Service Providers:** Recommendations aimed at establishing baseline public-safety and competency standards for youth sports service providers operating within the state, particularly where public facilities or resources are utilized.
2. **Generation of Revenue:** Aimed at earmarking funds to support public recreation-based programs and access.
3. **Certification of Personnel:** Aimed at promulgating the Coach Safety Act in injury mitigation and reducing state Medicaid costs.
4. **Youth Sports Economic Development:** Explore sports tourism, facility development, and the economic impact of sporting events and tournaments. [24, 25]

D. Health Matters for Consideration

The Commission shall consider making recommendations concerning:

1. **Safety and Injury Prevention:** Evaluate and expand the Coach Safely Act; develop standards for emergency action plans, AED access, heat illness prevention, and concussion management. [1, 2, 4, 15, 44]
2. **Equitable Access and Participation:** Assess barriers in low-income, rural, and minority communities; recommend strategies to increase access and reduce cost. [17, 26, 30]
3. **Positive Youth Development:** Promote evidence-based approaches that prioritize physical, psychological, and social development; address early specialization, overtraining, and burnout. [1, 13, 14]
4. **Abuse Prevention and Safeguarding:** Strengthen background check requirements, mandatory reporting, prohibited conduct policies, and abuse prevention training. [7, 8, 9, 16]
5. **Mental Health and Well-Being:** Address anxiety, depression, burnout, and the impact of parental and coaching pressure. [1, 10, 11]
6. **Data Collection and Research:** Establish systematic data collection on participation, injuries, and outcomes to inform evidence-based policy. [17, 32]

E. Composition and Membership

The Commission membership and terms of appointment should be the Governor's recommendation to the Legislature to be enacted as law and to be administratively defined and funded. The Governor would appoint the Chairman, Vice Chairman, and representatives from relevant state departments. The CoachSafely Foundation shall have a permanent designee. The Senate Pro Tem and the House Speaker would appoint representation. A proposed structure of approximately 10 members with 2–4 ex-officio members:

Position / Expertise	Appointed By	Qualifications
Chairman	Governor	Represents the administration
Vice Chairman	Governor	Appointed by the Governor
State Department Reps (3)	Governor	Representatives from relevant state agencies (e.g., Public Health, Education, Parks & Recreation)
CoachSafely Foundation	Permanent	Permanent designee of the CoachSafely Foundation
Senate Appointees (2)	Senate Pro Tem	Consistent with legislative terms
House Appointees (2)	House Speaker	Consistent with legislative terms
Sports Business & Econ. Dev.	Governor	Expert in sports industry economics, sports analytics, revenue strategy, sports tourism, or sports marketing
Sports Medicine Expert	Governor	Physician with pediatric/adolescent sports medicine expertise

Governor-appointed members shall serve 4- or 2-year terms. Legislative appointees shall serve terms consistent with their legislative terms. Members serve without compensation but may be reimbursed for expenses. Ex-officio members (2–4) may include representatives from additional stakeholder organizations.

F. Administrative Support and Operations

The Alabama Department of Public Health shall provide administrative support. The Commission shall:

- Meet initially no later than 90 days after all members are appointed, and at least quarterly thereafter.
- Investigate the state commerce of youth sports as a viable source of funding for public health administration.
- Investigate shared objectives for increased youth sports participation with Health and Human Services grants to mitigate chronic diseases in youth.
- Hold at least one public hearing annually to receive testimony from parents, coaches, athletes, and community members.
- Submit an annual report to the Governor, the Legislature, and the supporting agency by December 31 of each year.
- Coordinate with the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA), the Alabama Department of Public Health, the Alabama Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA), and the Alabama Department of Education.

III. The Strategic Case for an Alabama Youth Sports Commission

A. A Natural Fit for Alabama's Next Governor

Alabama's next Governor will inherit a state with one of the deepest sports cultures in the nation. Establishing this commission would be among the most visible and popular early actions a new Governor could take—demonstrating leadership on an issue that touches nearly every family in the state.

B. A Bipartisan Winner

Youth sports safety is not a partisan issue. The Illinois Commission passed 109–0 in the House and 46–11 in the Senate. Every family with children in sports cares about safety, access, and well-being. This commission offers a signature policy achievement that unites rather than divides. [19]

C. Economic Development Alignment

Youth sports represent a massive economic engine—families spend over \$40 billion annually nationally, and sports tourism generated \$91.8 billion in total economic impact in 2021. A commission could attract tournaments and events to Alabama, develop world-class facilities, and position the state as a destination for sports tourism. [24, 27]

D. Cost-Neutral Benefit for Public Safety

By creating a governance framework to protect the state's fiscal resources and public safety, the Commission could recommend that revenue from licensing of non-state actors be earmarked to offset the cost of administration. For example, private or out-of-state organizations sponsoring youth sports activity on government property, per the Coach Safety Act (2018-496), or soliciting the state population for volunteers, could be required to register with the Secretary of State, subject to legislative authorization. [34]

E. Alabama's Legacy Continues

Alabama was the first state to mandate youth coach training. Now it would become one of the first states—and the first in the Deep South—to establish a comprehensive commission on youth sports. That is a legacy statement.

IV. Lessons from Other States

Our analysis of existing state-level youth sports bodies reveals key lessons:

1. **Breadth of Mandate Matters:** The Illinois model covers access, equity, safety, positive youth development, adaptive sports, and disadvantaged communities. Alabama's commission should be equally broad—and go further by addressing the fiscal and commercial dimensions of youth sports. [19]

2. **Governor Appointment Is Key:** In Illinois, the Governor appoints the majority of members. Legislative members provide bipartisan legitimacy. [19]
3. **Administrative Home Matters:** Placing the commission within an existing agency provides support without new bureaucracy. Alabama's Department of Public Health is a natural fit. [19]
4. **Annual Reporting Creates Accountability:** Illinois requires an annual report. Alabama should adopt the same. [19]
5. **Include Diverse Voices:** Effective commissions include coaches, parents, medical professionals, researchers, and representatives of underserved communities. [19, 20]
6. **Build on Existing Strengths:** Minnesota built around its unique facilities. Alabama should build on the Coach Safely Act infrastructure, the Andrews Sports Medicine network, and Samford's Center for Sports Analytics. [23, 29]

V. The Team Behind This Proposal

Darin W. White, Ph.D.

Dr. White, Executive Director of the Center for Sports Analytics at Samford University, is an Alabama native who grew up in Birmingham and was part of the first generation of players who brought soccer to the state in the 1970s and 1980s. He played college soccer at Birmingham-Southern College and earned his Ph.D. from the University of Alabama. After coaching college soccer for nearly a decade in Tennessee—where he led his team to the 2003 NCCAA National Championship and was inducted into the Union University Sports Hall of Fame in 2023—he returned home to Alabama in 2009. Two years later, he founded the first sports business program in an AACSB-accredited business school in the South at Samford University. He went on to establish the Center for Sports Analytics, the nation's first sports analytics center in an AACSB-accredited business school. The Sports Industry Program now enrolls over 250 students and places graduates in sports business careers around the world with organizations including the Houston Texans, Portland Trail Blazers, Minnesota Vikings, and dozens of other professional and college properties.

Beyond the classroom, Dr. White coached elite youth soccer in Alabama for 15 years, winning nine state championships. He has forged partnerships with over 250 of the world's leading sports organizations, and his insights have been cited or quoted in the Wall Street Journal, Forbes, Washington Post, NPR, and Sports Illustrated. His combination of deep Alabama roots, a Ph.D. in marketing strategy, and expertise spanning youth fields to professional front offices gives him a unique perspective on growing and protecting the youth sports ecosystem in this state.

James R. Andrews, M.D.

Dr. Andrews is among the most renowned orthopedic surgeons in the world, based in Birmingham, Alabama. He co-founded the American Sports Medicine Institute (ASMI) and the Andrews Sports Medicine & Orthopaedic Center, and has mentored over 650 sports medicine fellows throughout his career across ASMI and the Andrews Research and Education Foundation (AREF). Dr. Andrews serves on the CoachSafely Foundation's executive committee and was instrumental in developing the safety training course at the heart of the Coach Safely

Act. He is an inductee of the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame, Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame, and Alabama Business Hall of Fame.

Coach Jack Crowe

Coach Crowe is the architect of the Coach Safely Act, founder of the CoachSafely Foundation, and President of the CoachSafelySports Policy Institute. A distinguished college football coach who served as head coach at Arkansas and held positions at Auburn, Jacksonville State, and South Alabama, he recognized the critical gap in youth coach training and spent years building the coalition that made Alabama's pioneering law possible. He now leads national initiatives for coach training policy across the country through the CoachSafelySports Policy Institute. [29, 31]

Coach Bill Clark

Coach Clark is the President of the CoachSafely Foundation and one of the winningest coaches in Alabama history, combining both high school and collegiate success. At Prattville High School, the University of South Alabama, Jacksonville State, and the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Coach Clark was nationally recognized for his coaching excellence. The CoachSafely Foundation has delivered over 75,000 coach training completions across Alabama since the Coach Safely Act took effect, and is now advising multiple states on similar legislation. He is positioned to help direct the Alabama Youth Sports Commission. [29, 31]

VI. Recommended First-Year Priorities

1. **Comprehensive State Assessment:** Conduct the first-ever statewide assessment of youth sports in Alabama—participation data, organizational inventory, safety compliance, facility conditions, and access gaps.
2. **Coach Safely Act Evaluation:** Evaluate effectiveness and enforcement across municipalities. Recommend expansions and updated training content. [31]
3. **Emergency Action Plan Standards:** Develop model EAP standards including AED access, heat illness protocols, and CPR-trained personnel requirements. [4, 5, 15]
4. **Safeguarding Framework:** Develop model prohibited conduct and safeguarding policies following the Colorado model. [7, 16, 21]
5. **Public Hearings:** Hold at least three hearings—in Birmingham, Montgomery, and Mobile or Huntsville—to gather community input.
6. **First Annual Report:** Deliver baseline data and a prioritized multi-year action agenda to the Governor and Legislature by December 31.

VII. Conclusion

The children of Alabama deserve a youth sports system that is safe, accessible, well-governed, and built on evidence. The establishment of the Alabama Commission on Youth Sports would position the next Governor as the national leader on this issue, building on a legacy that Alabama began with the Coach Safely Act.

This commission requires minimal administrative resources—it is an advisory body, not a new agency—but its impact would be enormous. It would give the state a permanent, structured mechanism to address the safety, health, equity, and developmental challenges that parents, coaches, and communities face every day. It would attract national attention and position Alabama as a model for every other state.

We stand ready to assist in any way required. The Center for Sports Analytics at Samford University, Dr. James Andrews, and the CoachSafelySports Policy Institute are committed to supporting this initiative with research, data, expertise, and advocacy.

Alabama led the nation in youth sports safety. Now let Alabama lead the nation in youth sports governance.

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Note on Methodology and Production

This document was prepared with the assistance of Claude, an AI research and writing tool developed by Anthropic, under the direction and editorial oversight of Dr. Darin W. White. Claude was used to conduct literature searches, synthesize academic research, identify legislative precedents, and assist in drafting. All factual claims, statistics, and source attributions have been independently verified against original sources unless otherwise noted. The analysis, recommendations, and policy positions contained herein reflect the professional judgment of the authors and their partners.

Appendix A: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Does this proposal create a new state agency?

A: No. The Alabama Commission on Youth Sports would be an advisory body housed within an existing agency (the Alabama Department of Public Health). It would have no regulatory authority, no enforcement powers, and no independent budget. Members would serve without compensation. This is consistent with the model adopted in Illinois, where the Commission on Youth Sports operates within the Department of Human Services.

Q: Does this commission regulate private youth sports organizations?

A: No. The Commission's role is advisory. It would gather data, hold public hearings, and make recommendations to the Governor and Legislature. It would not have authority to regulate, license, or impose requirements on any private organization. Any future regulatory action would require separate legislative authorization.

Q: Does this impose new taxes or fees?

A: No. The proposal does not create, authorize, or recommend any new taxes or fees. The Commission may study the fiscal dimensions of youth sports as interstate commerce and make recommendations, but any revenue-generating measures would require separate legislative action.

Q: Why is youth sports a matter of state government concern?

A: Youth sports involve public property (municipal parks, school facilities, recreation centers), public health (injury prevention, emergency response, mental health), public safety (background checks, safeguarding policies), and significant economic activity. The federal government has already recognized youth sports as interstate commerce through the Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017 (S.534). Alabama has classified youth sports activities as “high risk” under its Administrative Code. Currently, no state-level body exists to coordinate policy across these overlapping areas of public interest. [35, 36]

Q: How is this different from what the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA) does?

A: The AHSAA governs interscholastic (school-based) athletics for grades 7–12. The proposed Commission would focus on non-interscholastic youth sports—the vast majority of organized youth athletics in Alabama, which currently operates outside any coordinated state oversight. These are the travel leagues, recreation programs, club teams, and private organizations serving children ages 14 and under.

Q: What would the Commission do in its first year?

A: The Commission's recommended first-year priorities include conducting the first comprehensive statewide assessment of youth sports in Alabama, evaluating Coach Safely Act implementation, developing model emergency action plan standards, holding public hearings in Birmingham, Montgomery, and Mobile or Huntsville, and delivering a baseline report with a multi-year action agenda to the Governor and Legislature by December 31.

Q: Is this a partisan proposal?

A: No. Youth sports safety and access are bipartisan issues. The Illinois Commission on Youth Sports passed 109–0 in the House and 46–11 in the Senate. This proposal is presented as a policy opportunity for the State of Alabama regardless of party affiliation. [19]

Q: What is the Coach Safely Act, and how does this build on it?

A: The Coach Safely Act (2018) made Alabama the first state in the nation to require safety training for youth coaches working with children ages 14 and under on public property. It has since been replicated or informed legislation in ten other states. The 2025 amendment (SB140) added public-health oversight and penalties for non-compliance. A Commission would extend Alabama’s leadership from coach training to comprehensive youth sports governance—addressing safety, access, equity, economic development, and interstate commerce. [29, 31, 34]

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