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Bill would give state oversight of AHSAA



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Alabama lawmakers are seeking to gain oversight over the Alabama High School Athletic Association after the organization controversially ruled Charles Henderson High School basketball standout Maori Davenport ineligible in her senior season.

State Rep. Kyle South (R – Fayette) announced on Wednesday that he has drafted legislation providing a measure of government oversight of the AHSAA operations.

South said the bill will be pre-filed for consideration in the 2019 regular session and 87 of the 105 members of the Alabama House have already signed on as co-sponsors. Rep. Mike Jones of Andalusia is among them.

"Rather than taking special circumstances into consideration and impartially considering the facts at hand, the Alabama High School Athletic Association has created an unnecessary national controversy and callously ruled in a manner that adversely affects an innocent young woman's eligibility," South said. "Time and time again, the AHSAA has engaged in behavior and ruled in a manner that clearly calls for more oversight of its actions. Considering the AHSAA receives a majority of its funds from taxpayer-funded public schools and the athletic activities of public school students, there is ample justification for government oversight of its operations."







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Davenport was ruled ineligible by the AHSAA on December 4 for receiving and cashing an \$857.20 check from USA Basketball. Davenport played with the USA under-18 team over the summer in Mexico City, earning a gold medal. **Friday afternoon update:** Circuit Court Judge Sonny Reagan on Friday granted an emergency motion filed by Mario and Tara Davenport, Maori Davenport's parents, asking that the court review the facts surrounding their daughter's case and restrain the AHSAA from stripping the star student athlete of her eligibility.

As a result, Maori Davenport is eligible to play pending a hearing before the Judge. She will take the court when the Charles Henderson Lady Trojans play Ozark's Carroll High School tonight. This will be the first time the gold medalist has been able to play in an AHSAA sanctioned game since the organization ruled her ineligible in November.

Two appeals by Charles Henderson High School were denied by AHSAA boards, and local and national awareness of Davenport's story grew.

Despite criticism of the decision on a national scale, the AHSAA further dug in on its stance Monday, releasing a statement defending the ruling and stating that "most eligibility violations are results of adults failing to follow the rules" and that Maori's parents, coaches and USA Basketball all should have known about the rule.

Rep. Jones said he also favors other things the bill requires of AHSAA, including an annual audit, and appointments to certain AHSAA boards by the state school board or state superintendent.

Troy Mayor Jason Reeves and Rep. Wes Allen accompanied Davenport to Montgomery Tuesday as she made her case to legislative officials. Allen, who just took office, also is co-sponsoring the bill with South.

"I think it's important to make sure we have some oversight into the AHSAA; right now they don't have any oversight," Allen said. "It is to prevent something like this from happening in the future. One thing she talked about yesterday visiting legislators is to not let this happen to any future student athletes."

Sen. Jimmy Holley, R-Elba, who also represents Pike and Covington counties in the Alabama Senate, said Davenport made an impression on lawmakers during her visit.

"I just think that the young lady makes such an impression of being not only a good athlete, but also a quiet, gentle, loving person," Holley said. "She is easy to talk with and I think she made a great impression on everybody ... The compliments have been very good about her demeanor; she made a

great impression. I think that's why everyone is going to rally around her and see if they can't get her eligibility."

Under the provision's of South's legislation, the State Board of Education would be required to review and approve any rules relating to student participation and eligibility before being adopted by AHSAA.

The bill will not affect Davenport's eligibility as the session will commence after her senior season has already ended. But Holley said it is important to keep the situation from repeating itself.

"There might be another one around the corner that fits the same situation," Holley said. "If they would apply such limited judgment to her, they would do it to someone else also."

Jacob Holmes of The Troy Messenger contributed to this story.



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