

Bill would bring state oversight to Washington Interscholastic Activities Association, expand state basketball tournament

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The bill, expected to be introduced to the state legislature Thursday, would allow the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction say on WIAA rules. It would also demand the state basketball tournament return to 16 teams.

Two state senators plan to introduce a bill Thursday that would bring the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association under state oversight.

And it would demand the state basketball tournament return to a 16-team format.

Spokane Republican Michael Baumgartner and Bellevue Democrat Patty Kuderer are co-sponsoring the bill.

The bill would allow the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to have oversight over rules passed by the WIAA, the state's governing body for high-school sports.

The purpose of the bill, Baumgartner said Wednesday, is to bring oversight from somebody who was voted into office over the WIAA, which is a private organization.

"The WIAA is spending public dollars," Baumgartner said. "But having oversight by the OSPI, that will have a structure that will have a better sense of process and fairness."

The WIAA's second-highest source of revenue (\$625,000 in 2015-16) come from the fees collected from member institutions, which are most of the public and private high schools around the state. The biggest source of revenue is income from state tournaments (\$2,325,000 in 2015-16).

WIAA executive director Mike Colbrese hadn't heard about the bill when contacted Wednesday night.

"Until we are able to see the legislation, and visit with the WIAA executive board, we will not be able to comment," Colbrese said.

Baumgartner introduced a similar bill in February 2017 that would have given the state legislature oversight of rules passed by the WIAA.

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Baumgartner has been motivated in part by complaints from former Bellevue players and parents who were displeased by a WIAA investigation in 2016 that found the football program participated in illegal recruiting. A series of [stories in The Seattle Times](#) prompted the investigation.

Three former players and their families [filed a lawsuit in November](#) claiming discrimination, misconduct and negligence during the process.

The WIAA, which also oversees activities such as forensics and cheer competitions, has two methods of passing rules (called amendments as they amend the state rule book): The main one is through the representative assembly, which is made up of 53 members (typically athletic directors and other school

officials) from across the state. The second is through the executive board, made up of 13 school officials from across the state.

The number of teams playing in the state basketball tournaments has been a controversial issue since the WIAA switched from a 16-team format in 2011. That season, 16 teams played in regional tournaments (usually at high schools across the state) with only eight teams making it to the state tournament.

This format has been unpopular with the Washington Interscholastic Basketball Coaches Association, which has been unhappy with the amount of players deprived of the “state experience.”

“They’re putting dollars and cents over kids’ experiences,” WIBCA executive director Nalin Sood, the boys basketball coach at Mountlake Terrace, said last month.

The WIAA, which moved to the new format as a cost-saving measure as it cuts the rental of state tournament venues in half, [moved to a 12-team format last year](#).