

# State reps pen letter to PIAA to level playing field in high school sports broadcasting



FILE — Elk County Catholic's Lance O'Neil (15) during the Crusaders' season-ending loss to Union Area in the second round of the PIAA State Tournament on Tuesday, March 12.

Era photo by Hunter O. Lyle

HARRISBURG — Following years of inaction by the Pennsylvania

Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) to fix a broken broadcasting policy, Reps. Marla Brown (R-Lawrence), Jim Struzzi (R-Indiana) and Brian Smith (R-Jefferson/Indiana) have sent a formal letter to PIAA demanding change.

The PIAA recently entered into an agreement with the National Federation of State High School (NFHS) Association, the body that writes the rules of competition for most high school sports and activities in the United States. NFHS can provide a streaming service, and often, schools will choose to exercise that capability in high-profile situations. What this does is eliminate the ability for local media outlets covering the away teams to do what they do best and requires anyone who wishes to stream the game to pay a subscription fee to access it.

Brown, Struzzi and Smith issued this statement after sending the letter, signed by 45 lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, to the PIAA:

“The PIAA’s current broadcasting policy is unfair on many levels, and most importantly, to the families of the players on the fields and courts of Pennsylvania. Our athletes work for years to hone their skills in their respective sports, and a lucky few get the chance to show those skills in PIAA playoff matchups. However, those matchups can be several hours away from their local communities.

“Pennsylvania is blessed with many local media outlets who faithfully cover high school sports throughout the season. More often than not, those outlets are happy to travel whatever distance is required to cover their teams for their communities. But time and time again, they’re blocked by the exclusivity contract between the PIAA and NFHS. These athletes finally reach their moment on the big stage, and all too often their friends and family are blocked from watching them by an NFHS

paywall.

“During a 2022 hearing the Department of Education assured lawmakers that the issue of exclusivity between PIAA and the NFHS Network would be resolved. On January 26th, 2023, legislation was introduced to allow visiting teams in high school athletic competitions, and their local broadcasters, the same rights to broadcast, stream, and provide play-by-play as the home team. As of today, House Bill 30, the Fair Play in Broadcasting Act, has strong bipartisan support and could move from the House Education Committee at any time.

“It has become clear that fair broadcasting is not a priority being addressed in the PIAA. We, and the 42 other lawmakers who signed our letter, believe this issue needs to be addressed as soon as possible for the sake of Pennsylvania’s players, families and fans.”