

Resolution from legislative committee calls for PIAA to have separate playoffs for public, private schools

House member contends private/Catholic/charter schools have unfair advantage over public schools because of geographic limitations



Over the years, everyone from some fans to coaches and administrators of public schools have called for the PIAA to have

separate playoffs for public and private/Catholic/charter schools. Now, a group of Pennsylvania legislators are calling for separate playoffs.

The Pennsylvania House Commerce Committee passed a resolution Wednesday urging the PIAA to establish separate playoffs for public and private/Catholic/charter schools. The committee voted 24-1 for the resolution.

An obvious question: What does the resolution mean? Well, not much. It's not a bill that will come up for vote in the House or Senate. The PIAA doesn't have to react to the resolution. But Scott Conklin, D-Centre, is the chairman of the Commerce Committee and the man behind the resolution, and he says it is at least a start to possibly get the PIAA to have separate playoffs.

"This is the first time that anyone has even been able to make any movement on this," Conklin said.

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Conklin said he has a bill on separate playoffs that has been stuck in the Education Committee for months.

"I've tried to move legislation on this, but to be quite blunt, there are members of both caucuses who have graduated from Catholic or private schools or are sending their kids to private, Catholic or charter schools who will not run these bills," Conklin said. "If we could get the bill to the House floor, it would pass. If we could get it to the Senate, it would pass."

Conklin echoes the sentiment from many public schools that private/Catholic/charter schools have an unfair advantage in high school sports because public schools have geographic boundaries for their students. But private/Catholic/charter schools have no geographic boundaries to attract students and can take students from anywhere and everywhere. For example, St. Joseph's Prep, a football powerhouse from Philadelphia that has won eight state championships since 2013, has had numerous players from other states over the years. Conklin also said some of the non-boundary schools recruit athletes.

Conklin was adamant he is not against private/Catholic/charter schools. He said they are good for some students. Bob Lombardi, the executive director of the PIAA, has said in the past that the PIAA has no desire to have separate tournaments unless forced by the state Legislature. Lombardi and other PIAA officials have contended the organization can't go against a 1972 law that forced the PIAA to accept Catholic schools into membership. Critics contend the law only said the PIAA must accept Catholic schools; it did not say there can't be separate postseason tournaments.

"Legal scholars have said the PIAA is wrong when they say they can't do separate playoffs," Conklin said. "This is not a new concept, and I'm not going away until someone throws me out of office. I strongly believe in fairness. That's what this is about. I've visited charter and Catholic schools. I'm not against them at all. I just want to make sure All-Star teams play other All-Star teams. Don't you think that would be fun and a good idea?"

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