

# ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE GUIDANCE *for* SCHOOL ATHLETIC STAFF *on* HATE INCIDENTS

School sports can help students develop leadership and teamwork skills, foster diversity and inclusion, and bring communities together. But achieving these goals takes work. School administrators, athletic directors, coaches, referees and other adult leaders must collaborate to provide safe and supportive environments for student athletes – and prevent biased and hateful behavior from occurring in the locker room or on the field. The Massachusetts Attorney General's Office is providing this Guidance to assist school communities in their continuing efforts to keep bias and hate out of sports and help ensure school athletics live up to their potential.

## *Athletic Directors, coaches, referees, and team staff should:*

- **PAY ATTENTION:** Be watchful for problematic behavior by student athletes, parents, and spectators, including the use of slurs, bias-related jokes, insults, taunting, or other misconduct that involves race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other personal characteristics.
- **BE THE ADULT IN THE ROOM:** Put a stop to problematic behavior when you see it, and avoid leaving players unsupervised, including in locker rooms, before and after practices, and during team travel.
- **PROVIDE LEADERSHIP:** Take affirmative steps to develop a positive team culture. Provide programming and training about bias and hate in sports. Make it easy for student athletes to report hateful and biased behavior to any trusted adults and through the existing school infrastructure for reporting.
- **REPORT PROBLEMS:** Schools have legal responsibilities to address bias-related bullying and harassment. These responsibilities extend to all school-sponsored activities, including sports. Any incidents of potential bullying or harassment must be reported to appropriate school officials – whether they occur in the locker room, on the field, during team travel, or “off-campus.” Schools that fail to identify and address problems may violate students’ civil rights, so prompt communication about anything concerning is the best approach.

Hazing on sports teams often involves biased and hateful behavior. Hazing is any harmful conduct or method of initiating players onto a team. Hazing is a crime in Massachusetts. Athletic Departments must provide information to students on hazing each year and make certain they have compliant policies and procedures in place to prevent hazing. Athletic staff should report any hazing activity to appropriate school officials or law enforcement. Failure to report hazing to law enforcement may be a crime in certain circumstances.

