



State of South Carolina

Office of the Governor

MARK SANFORD
GOVERNOR

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June 16, 2008

The Honorable André Bauer
President of the Senate
State House, First Floor, East Wing
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Mr. President and Members of the Senate:

I am hereby vetoing S. 577, R-403, which, among other things, doubles the penalties for assault and battery upon coaches and sports officials.

Let me begin by saying that we appreciate Sen. Sheheen's attempt with this bill to deter assaults upon coaches and sports officials. Coaches are to be admired for the way they dedicate time and energy in instructing young people in life lessons that will make an impact on who and what these young people do and become. In the same vein, sports officials teach young athletes about the larger notion of rules going with life. It is a sorry commentary on society at large when a bill like this needs to even be debated, but it does given the fact that attacks have taken place. I believe that attacks by overzealous parents to be wrong and deserving of our greatest condemnation and prosecution under the law.

I also believe this prosecution should take place under existing law because changing it as this bill does sets a dangerous precedent of carving out a special status for coaches and officials that other citizens don't enjoy. Assault of any kind, to any South Carolinian, for any reason - is wrong and should be immediately dealt with. When we begin elevating certain people to a status where they get extra protection under the law, we begin to signal the crime can be less egregious in other instances. Again, the view of the Administration is assault is wrong to anyone - every time. There are many other individuals who perform valuable functions for society who are not entitled to special protection. For example, clergy members, Boy Scout leaders, and other types of mentors have similar roles as coaches in instructing our youth, but they would not receive extra protection under this bill. Can anyone really say that an attack on a coach is worse than an attack on a minister who is trying to help in a thorny domestic situation? We believe wrong is wrong every time and, therefore, we believe it is a better policy to create uniform penalties for attacks that give all citizens equal protection under the law.

For these reasons, I am vetoing S. 577, R-403.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "MS", written over a horizontal line.

Mark Sanford