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**NEW YORK
STATE
WRESTLING
COACHES
ASSOCIATION**

**Richard Romeo
President**

185 Granger St
Canandaigua, NY 14424
(585) 230-0869

**John Leone
Vice-President**

27 Blue Pine Circle
Penfield, NY 14526
(585) 249-6466

**Dick Farfaglia
Exec. Director**

422 Howard Road
Fulton, NY 13069
(315) 593-6017

Dear Assembly Member,

It was, once again, disappointing to see NYSPHSAA oppose the Fairness In Competition Act (A2162-A) as expressed in Nina VanErk's May 18, 2006 letter sent to you via e-mail.

We are at a loss to explain why the Association would misrepresent the intent of the legislation. NYSPHSAA's letter claims their concern is the legislation's effect on the Association in general. They ignore the fact that the bill was amended to target state competition for individual sports not organized according to NYSPHSAA's five standard school population classifications.

The legislation focuses on those individual sports where NYSPHSAA policies are most unfair and do the most harm. Any format for state competition which allows one entry from an area where there are just two competitors - and restricts a neighboring area where there are fifty competitors to only one entry - is fundamentally unfair on its face. No state in the union conducts its championship competition in such an inequitable fashion. Assembly Bill A2162-A is modeled after California's proportionally based multiple-entry system that has 35 years of experience behind it. While NYSPHSAA makes the kind of fairness adjustments proposed in this legislation for some sports it governs, it has refused to do so for the sports covered by Assemblyman Morelle's bill.

Ironically, opponents of this legislation fail to recognize how their current policy contradicts the very educational values we teach in our schools. Instead of organizing and conducting fair state competitions, their policies deliberately continue an indefensible system that disadvantages hundreds of athletes. Moreover, the practical impact of this discriminatory policy is that it denies student-athletes a fair opportunity to achieve and excel – important considerations for college admissions.

The Association would have you believe that the 690 entrants in a multiple-entry tournament would somehow be way out of line. That's just not the case. New York would be joining states like Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Montana in tournament size. Even then, New York, with hundreds of more schools than these states, would still likely be one of the smaller state tournaments when considering the number of schools offering the sport compared to the number of entries in the state tournament.

The exaggerated claim that the costs to school districts would be too much to bear must be addressed. As proposed, the multiple-entry format would call for 240 additional individual entries from 550 schools – on average one additional entry per school for less than half the schools. When the reality of competition is factored in, some schools will qualify more than one additional entry, but even then the costs are far from burdensome. This is demonstrated by the fact that some schools – because of a lack of competitors at the qualifying event - have been sending a disproportionate number entries to the state championships for years without complaint.

Historically, the NYSPHSAA State Wrestling Tournament is the Association's third biggest money-maker. There is every reason to believe that New York's tournament would make an even greater profit from an expanded well-run tournament, as is the experience in every other state in the country. In fact, in some states, the profits are large enough to cover all or part of the expenses incurred by schools to send athletes to the tournament.

It is also worth mentioning the unrealized potential economic impact of a multiple-entry tournament for the state's communities. While New York's tournament shops around each year for a community with an appropriate facility willing to host the event, communities in other states compete for the rights to host the state wrestling tournament. Nebraska, with only 218 schools, recently experienced a bidding war between Lincoln and Omaha to host the event where 46,000 fans spent millions of dollars in the community to attend the annual event.

Finally, A2162-A is the remedy of last resort to overcome an association organized on a system that rejects the principal of “one person, one vote.” Voting on policy issues – when it occurs – is much like the single-entry tournament we seek to reform. Each of the 11 sections casts a single vote – regardless of how many schools or students he or she may represent. The vote by a section representing 10 schools carries the same weight as the vote by a section representing 100 schools. On some issues, like establishing a proportionally based multiple-entry tournament, the executive committee, which ultimately approves such changes, ties the hands of the sports committee by telling them in advance of considering such a change that they will not approve. As if those were not big enough impediments to reform, there are sport committee members, who are bound by their sectional chair to represent the interests of the section over the interests of the student-athlete and their sport.

We ask you to be guided in your deliberations by the idea that we should do what’s right for the kids. If you do, we believe A2162-A deserves your support.

Sincerely,

Dick Farfaglia
Executive Director

Richard Romeo
President