

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Rowan's Law will protect athletes from concussions

Earlier this year, Ontario's legislature unanimously passed Rowan's Law.

Named after Rowan Stringer, the 17-year-old rugby player who passed away as a result of sustaining multiple concussions, the law would take several steps to ensure better management and prevention of concussions.

Undiagnosed or improperly managed concussions can lead to long term and serious health impacts. According to the Globe and Mail, "almost 40 per cent of youth who go to the hospital after a sports-related head injury have a concussion and a further 24 per cent possibly having suffered one." Ensuring we have protocols in place to protect our young people's developing brains is crucial. If someone returns to play before being fully recovered from a concussion, it is easier to obtain another and likely more significant concussion.

In 2013, following Rowan's death, a coroner's inquest provided 49 recommendations to improve concussion awareness and treatment. Later, in 2016, my Progressive Conservative colleague Lisa MacLeod introduced legislation to create an advisory committee to Ontario's Premier to advise on the implementation of those recommendations. The Rowan's Law Advisory Committee Act, 2016, was co-sponsored by all three parties and supported unanimously by the legislature.

Since that time, the Advisory Committee has been working hard to make Rowan's Law the best legislation possible. The members of the Advisory Panel included Rowan's father Gordon Stringer and former NHLer Eric Lindros, whose career was cut short by concussions. The panel also consulted with experts, researchers and sports leaders.

First, the law would require coaches and educators to be trained in concussion awareness, management and prevention before they can register in a sport. This will help them identify concussions and ensure that athletes with a concussion receive the care they need. Second, it would put in place protocols which would ensure that athletes suspected of having sustained a concussion are immediately removed from the sport and given time to properly heal. Third, it sets out a concussion code of conduct that would set out rules of behavior to minimize concussions while playing sport.

It has been five years since the coroner's report. Government moves slow. But the efforts of all three parties to make this issue move forward and get the best system in place possible, speaks to the fact that good work can be done at Queen's Park.

Finally, Rowan's Law also created Rowan's Law Day every year on the last Wednesday in September. I hope that you will mark Rowan's Law Day Sept. 26 and raise awareness about the need for better recognition and treatment of concussions.

