



STATE SENATE CANDIDATE STEVE CHOI
"CIAC CANCELS FALL FOOTBALL"

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TRUMBULL 09/08/2020 – Steve Choi, the Republican candidate for State Senate in District 22, which includes the municipalities of Trumbull, Bridgeport, and Monroe, issued the following statement regarding the decision of the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) to cancel the fall season of football:

After months of work and numerous plan revisions, the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC), the governing body for high school athletics, decided on Friday to cancel the fall football season. CIAC Commissioner Glenn Lugarini, citing the need to follow Department of Public Health (DPH) Acting Commissioner Deidre Gifford's guidelines, and a September 3rd [Hartford Courant article](#) that details intentions by school superintendents to follow the orders of CT DPH, capitulated to the state experts. "It's an impossible situation to put our school districts in, to make a decision counter to a state agency they rely heavily upon, to bring kids back to school," stated Lugarini. "Even given all the rules and safety protocols, the Department of Health was never going to allow high school boys to play fall football, and only approve guidelines for high school girls volleyball at the last minute."

The day following the cancellation of the season, 15 FCIAC head football coaches, including Trumbull High School coach Marce Petroccio, and St. Joseph's coach Joe Della Vecchia, sent a [letter](#) to Governor Lamont, Acting DPH Commissioner Gifford, and the CIAC Board of Control requesting that they reconsider the decision to cancel football. The letter cites the lowest Covid-19 rate of any U.S. state and 35 other states where fall football is approved. It highlights the hypocrisy of allowing other fall sports to proceed under new guidelines but cancels football. Why is it not okay to be outside with 70 players but it is acceptable to open schools to larger populations of students? This is yet another instance of government picking winners and losers. Why was football singled out?

State coaches planned throughout spring and summer to update and make modifications for the fall season. Players could opt out if they were fearful of playing, and parents would need to sign a waiver to allow their student athlete to play. 18 states have allowed traditional fall football to proceed, 14 states are allowing a modified fall football program, and another 14 states have moved football to spring. One state has allowed 7-on-7 without contact, and three states, (Connecticut among them) have canceled football with no option for spring.

The [letter](#) emphasizes the many benefits of youth sports that play an important role in a young person's life. On the newly formed Facebook group *Let Them Play – Connecticut*, there are heartwarming personal stories on the positive effects of playing high school football. Primary focus has been given to the dangers of contracting and spreading Covid-19 in school athletic settings. But many parents and former student athletes in the group are talking about the negative consequences of not having after school sports. How will the loss of football and after-school activities financially affect single and two parent households who rely upon schools to be open five days a week so they can work to support their family? What is the effect of keeping our children in complete isolation doing to their mental health?

Teamwork, confronting adversity, building mental strength, and lessons from disappointing losses are just some of the skillsets that sports teaches our children.

Some of our children have played sports since a young age. My son, Mateo, began playing youth football two years ago. He is an incoming Trumbull High School freshman and he has worked hard over the summer to condition and prepare for the fall season. His training included instructions from the coach on how to follow the new social distancing recommendations.

Students and parents have not given up on the season. Student athletes have started an [online petition](#) pleading their case to the Governor, DPH, and the CIAC. A portion of the petition reads, "...we have found ourselves sitting silent in the midst of both indecisive and inconsistent announcements from the CIAC. This has been, for lack of a better word, a living hell for us student athletes. And finally, when football is confirmed and everything seems fluid, we are once again stripped of our opportunity to play. Please, to the CIAC and Governor Lamont, all we ask as a united collective voice is to allow us to do what we love with the rest of our peers across the state playing their sports. Connecticut football has in place procedures that will make football safe to play."

The issue of fall football is surprisingly non-partisan. CT Speaker of the House and Berlin High School varsity football coach Joe Aresimowicz sided with parents and students for allowing high school football to proceed. Coach Aresimowicz stated, "Just like many players, coaches and parents, I too am upset about high school football being cancelled. I also spoke my piece about how I believe the Commissioner of Public Health got this wrong." Coach Aresimowicz, along with 5 other lawmakers, put their faith in Governor Lamont to [extend his declaration](#) to manage by executive order for additional 5 months until February 2021. If the majority of lawmakers have decided that Governor Lamont will be the arbiter of all governmental issues during these times, the Governor needs to sit down with his acting DPH Commissioner and CIAC commissioners and deliver a football season for Connecticut student athletes.

To the students and parents who would like to see their child have access to fall sports, sign the [petition](#), contact Governor Lamont's office's, register your complaint and tell the Governor we want to play. Governor Lamont can ease the restrictions of the DPH Commissioner. Governor Whitmer of Michigan lifted [restrictions](#) allowing high school football to be played on September 3rd after thousands of Michigan students and parents flooded her office with emails and calls. Applying pressure works; let your voice be heard!

Finally, ask your state senator, state representative, mayor, first selectman, board of education members, and your appointed superintendent of schools where they stand on allowing all student athletes to compete in fall sports. We owe it to our student athletes, our parents, our community, to #LetThemPlay.

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