

Esteemed members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Kyle Peckham. I am a certified athletic trainer and the assistant athletic director at Rice Memorial High School in South Burlington. I also serve as the Chair of the Secondary Schools Committee for the Vermont Association of Athletic Trainers and as Vice Chair of the Vermont Principals' Association Sports Medicine Advisory Committee. I'm a lifelong Vermonter who has been deeply involved in athletics across the state—as a player, coach, official, athletic trainer, and administrator.

I'm here today to urge you to include language in the miscellaneous education bill that **requires** all Vermont schools to implement **Cardiac Emergency Response Plans (CERPs)** and **Athletic Emergency Action Plans (EAPs)**. These plans should not be optional, suggested, or recommended—they must be mandated by law.

Sudden cardiac arrest is the leading cause of death in sport. It strikes over 350,000 people in the U.S. every year. While the incidence in young athletes may be rare, the consequences of being unprepared are devastating. The difference between life and death is often a matter of seconds—and whether a plan is in place and an AED is available. If someone receives a shock from an AED within one minute of sudden cardiac arrest, they have a 90% chance of survival, but that chance decreases by 10% for every minute that passes without defibrillation. We've seen lives saved because of this. We've also seen lives lost when this doesn't happen.

Ask yourself: *What if this happened to your child? Your spouse? Your parent?* Wouldn't you want everyone around them to be trained, equipped, and ready to act?

I expect you'll hear three main objections: **cost**, **implementation challenges**, and **redundancy with current VPA policy**. I will address each of these objections:

1. Cost

An AED costs between \$1,200 and \$1,800. That's comparable to the cost of one bus trip from Chittenden County to Bennington or Rutland counties. If schools can afford travel and sponsor extracurricular programs, they can afford to protect the lives of those participating in their programs.

There are grants, subsidies, and bid pricing options. VSIBIT, for example, allocates \$10,000 annually to school safety initiatives per school district. The proceeds from entry fees to one game could cover the cost of one of these devices. There is no excuse not to prioritize a small investment in a device that can save a life.

And what happens if a plan isn't in place? In 2018, Allen Harris, a 16-year-old football player in Washington, died after collapsing on the field during a training session. There was no athletic trainer, his coaches didn't recognize the cardiac arrest, didn't perform CPR, and didn't use an AED. They weren't prepared. They had no plan and Allen died as a result. Four years later, the

school district paid his family \$5.25 million in a settlement. If we are truly concerned about costs, we need to put measures in place to prevent situations that carry million dollar price tags.

2. Implementation

Some will say implementation is too hard. That's simply not true. Organizations like Project ADAM and the American Heart Association provide free resources and templates to help schools create these plans. I personally wrote Rice's emergency plan in under an hour. It is not a heavy lift. We practice these plans with our coaches and put our plans to the test. We let our coaches know that we may come out to a practice at any time and drop a CPR mannequin to signal an emergency action plan drill. With our football team two years ago the response time for the AED was over 4 minutes, we debriefed with our staff and this year the AED was retrieved and ready to be applied within 45 seconds. That change in time translates to a survival rate improvement of 30% for the victim just by practicing and having this plan in place.

3. VPA Policy Isn't Enough

While the VPA now mandates emergency planning, **not every school in Vermont is a VPA member**, and policy doesn't carry the same weight as law. Policies can change. Policies can be ignored. Laws can't. Making this a legal requirement ensures **accountability, consistency, and enforceability** across all Vermont schools, not just those participating in VPA competition.

We don't get to choose *if* a cardiac emergency happens—we only get to choose if we're ready to respond when it does.

You have the power to turn readiness into a requirement, not a recommendation. This isn't about checking boxes. It's about saving lives—possibly even the life of someone *you* know.

Don't wait until Vermont becomes the next tragic headline. Be proactive. Be bold. Make this the law.