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## ***Joint High School Athletics Overview Committee***

December 29, 2014

Dear Fellow Legislators:

Please find attached to this letter the 2014 Report of the Joint High School Athletics Overview Committee. This committee was formed pursuant to Senate Bill 288, which was passed during the 2014 Legislative Session. This is a joint Overview Committee composed of five members from the House, and five members from the Senate. The committee was formed to ensure that any high school association in Georgia that acts as an organizing, sanctioning, scheduling, or rule-making body for interscholastic athletic events in which Georgia's public high schools participate complies with releasing annual financial reports.

This Overview Committee is important because high school athletics foster many of the skills that students will use in high school and adulthood. High school athletics provide students in Georgia the opportunity to participate on a fair and equitable basis in interscholastic athletic programs that have been known to produce meaningful educational benefits for our students.

Please let us know if we can provide you with additional information regarding this Overview Committee. We appreciate your continued support of high school athletics in Georgia.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charlie Bethel".

Senator Charlie Bethel  
Senate Chairman  
District 54

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jay Roberts".

Representative Jay Roberts  
House Chairman  
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## **THE 2014 REPORT OF THE JOINT HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

Honorable Charlie Bethel  
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Honorable Ed Harbison  
Senator, District 15

Honorable Tyler Harper  
Senator, District 07

Honorable Jeff Mullis  
Senator, District 53

Honorable Renee Unterman  
Senator, District 45

Honorable Lindsey Tippins  
Senator, District 37

Honorable Jay Roberts  
Co-Chairman  
Representative, District 155

Honorable Randy Nix  
Representative, District 69

Honorable Chuck Martin  
Representative, District 49

Honorable Ronnie Mabra  
Representative, District 63

Honorable Amy Carter  
Representative, District 175

Honorable Brooks Coleman  
Representative, District 97

**Prepared by the Senate Research Office**  
**2014**

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## **I. WHY HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS OVERVIEW COMMITTEE WAS FORMED**

The Joint High School Athletics Overview Committee (Overview Committee) was created pursuant to Senate Bill 288, which was passed during the 2014 Legislative Session. The Overview Committee is charged with reviewing the operations of Georgia's high school athletic associations and evaluating the fairness and equity in establishing and implementing its standards, including the promotion of academic achievement and good sportsmanship.

## **II. COMMITTEE TESTIMONY**

Mr. Gary Phillips, Executive Director of the Georgia High School Association (GHSA), provided the Overview Committee with information regarding the organization. GHSA is located in Thomaston, Georgia. Their office personnel consist of the Executive Director, the Assistant Executive Director, and five other Associate Directors. GHSA's membership has grown in the past ten years, currently consisting of 451 public and private schools in the state of Georgia. The schools are divided into six classifications, based on enrollment or Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) counts. Each classification is then divided into eight regions of like-schools. The State Director, who is recommended by the Board of Trustees and then ratified by the entire Executive Committee, is responsible for the day-to-day operations of GHSA, and is authorized to interpret the rules, impose penalties, arrange State Tournaments and State Meets, and otherwise conduct the business of GHSA within the rules and guidelines adopted by the full State Executive Committee. However, everyone at GHSA answers to their Board of Trustees. Annual membership dues range from \$340.00 to \$985.00.

GHSA's mission is to promote education in Georgia from a mental, physical, and moral viewpoint; to standardize and encourage participation in athletics; and to promote sportsmanship and an appreciation for the study of music, speech, and other fine arts through region and state competitions.

The Overview Committee used this time to provide the GHSA staff with feedback they received from the public. Senator Bethel questioned the size of GHSA's Executive Committee and its ability to function with so many members. GHSA stated that reducing the size of the Executive Committee would require members to step down or vote themselves out, and none of the members were willing to do that. The Overview Committee: was concerned that constituents did not fully understand the rules of GHSA; expressed that constituents felt like they were not being heard by GHSA; and committee members wanted to be sure there would be equality between public and private schools. It was mentioned that GHSA was getting away from their mission statement, and was becoming all about the dollar. The Overview Committee wants to make sure it is all about the students, and that we are encouraging and providing our students the opportunity to participate in high school athletics. The Overview Committee was concerned that students were being turned away because of a lack of funding. Also, the Overview Committee questioned GHSA regarding their "application for hardship" process. GHSA assured the Overview Committee that it will be transparent. GHSA admitted that it was dealing with a record number of early year transfers and hardship appeals. GHSA stated they had seen over 375 appeals already and that this time last year the number was much lower. GHSA processed over 6000 transfers last year, and it appears that number will be higher for 2014-15. When Representative Martin asked exactly how many hardships were approved, GHSA responded by saying "The exact number is not known at this time; however, we approved more students than we denied." Representative Roberts commented on broadcasting fees and broadcast access, and asked about the associated fees and who was benefiting from the proceeds. GHSA

explained that all radio, internet, and TV broadcast rights were the property of individual schools in the regular season. All broadcast rights are controlled by the GHSA office in the post-season. All fees charged in the regular season are kept by the school; all fees charged in the post-season are shared by the two competing schools and the GHSA.

### III. **CONCLUSION**

According to GHSA, some of the issues discussed at the meeting are provided for in its by-laws. Any changes must be approved by the Executive Committee which meets bi-annually; once in April, and again in September. The next Executive Committee meeting will be held in late April 2015. Some issues may be discussed at this upcoming meeting. GHSA will also be considering plans for a reclassification process that will begin in late fall of 2015, to be implemented in cycle years 2016-18. It is the hopes of the Overview Committee that with the new leadership, GHSA will implement changes and be open to new ideas. GHSA realizes that they had some issues regarding public perception and stated they are working on resolving this issue. The Overview Committee will continue to monitor high school athletics in the state and intends to serve as a conduit for communication between GHSA and state government. GHSA and the Overview Committee members feel that GHSA is moving in the right direction.

Respectfully Submitted,

**THE JOINT HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**



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The Honorable Charlie Bethel  
Co-Chairman  
Senator, District 54



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The Honorable Jay Roberts  
Co-Chairman  
Representative, District 155