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To: Local Supervisors of Athletics, Member School Athletic Directors, Sport Officials

From: R. Andrew Warner, Executive Director, MPSSAA

RE: NFHS Uniform Standards- Hair Adornments

Pursuant to National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) regulations, each state association may, in keeping with applicable laws, authorize exceptions to NFHS playing rules. The exception shall not fundamentally alter the sport, heighten the risk of injury to the athlete/others, or place opponents at a competitive disadvantage.

NFHS playing rules detail hair adornments such as beads, bobby pins, flat clips, and flat barrettes as prohibited equipment. The Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA) herein grants the following accommodations for all sports for hair styles and adornments. The accommodations are necessary in order to ensure student participation is culturally responsive, and students are not discriminated against because of hair adornments that include protective hairstyles as defined in State Government Article 20-101(f), Annotated Code of Maryland. Moreover, high school sport officials should not determine participation related to a student's hairstyle and adornments.

Until further guidance is provided by the MPSSAA, effectively immediately:

1. Each local school system bears the responsibility for ensuring all school athletic administrators, athletic directors, coaches, participants, and parents/guardians are knowledgeable of each respective sports rule codes for participation.
2. Local school system coaches bear the responsibility of ensuring all members of their team are properly and safely equipped for participation in practice and contests.
3. If a student's coach has health, safety, or welfare concerns about a student's hair adornments or other competitors during competition, they shall refer the concern to their athletic director who will contact their appropriate local school system official for an individual analysis and decision regarding a student's hair adornment.
4. With approval of the appropriate local school system official, the student's athletic director and coach may require a student's hair adornment to be removed, secured in a way to protect the student or competitors, or exclude the student from competition only because of bona fide and articulable health, safety, or welfare reasons to the student or other students during competition.

5. Coaches shall be required to certify to the head official prior to all contests that their students are properly equipped to compete.
6. Officials are only required to ensure, as it relates to student hairstyles and hair adornments, that the head coach of each team has authorized that all participants on their respective team are properly equipped.
 - a. Officials may not touch any student's hair to check hair adornment(s).
 - b. Officials may not remove a hair adornment from the student's hair.
 - c. Officials shall not make determinations or comments about whether or not a hair adornment shall be removed or whether or not a student may participate with such hair adornment.
 - d. Officials, if requested for rule interpretation on hair adornments, shall refer the coach to the applicable rule for the head coach's discretion.
7. After the contest is complete, the official is requested to notify the local school system if they believe a student's hair adornment potentially poses a risk of injury to the athlete or others.
8. The member local school system shall make the final determination of an allowable hair adornment based on an individual analysis of risk of injury for future competitions.

Questions regarding exceptions to NFHS uniform standards that fundamentally alter the sport, heighten the risk of injury to the athlete/others, or place opponents at a competitive disadvantage shall be referred to the local educational agency and/or the MPSSAA for further review.

The MPSSAA recommends coaches have a copy of this letter available at each contest in the event an official or opposing school questions uniform compliance.