

August 13,2025

Fellow Softball Umpires,

Hello all. I hope that each of you are having a good summer season and doing your best to survive the oppressive heat. Many of you have been in touch with me about the July 9th release from the NFHS, which states that one of the 2026 rule changes would be as follows... "10-4-2: NFHS umpire slacks may either be charcoal gray or navy blue. The heather gray option was stricken from the rules book." This was followed up by a July 22nd message from Sandy Searcy to state directors saying..."Effective January 1, 2027, heather gray softball umpire slacks will no longer be permitted for use, as manufacturers have discontinued their production. This implementation date was inadvertently omitted from the NFHS Press Release, and we are providing this information now to clarify and assist with the transition to charcoal gray slacks. Slacks in either heather or charcoal gray will be permitted until January 1, 2027, when charcoal pants will be required". These announcements took me by surprise, but I feel like we should deal with this as directly as we can.

After speaking with Ken Kazmarek, I believe that all MPSSAA softball umpires need to start to make the change from heather to charcoal pants. The 2026 season will be a transitional one, with either heather or charcoal being accepted. Each association will need to do their best to have partners on the field match their local games. At the 2026 state semi and final levels, selected associations will need to send crews with all 3 crew members matching in the same heather or charcoal slacks. Starting with the 2027 state playoffs, only charcoal slacks will be accepted for all crew members.

Truthfully, like many of you have expressed, I personally prefer heather over charcoal slacks, but if the NFHS is instituting the change into our rulebooks, then we all need to follow their directive. I highly suggest that you start to add charcoal slacks to your official wardrobe as you prepare for next year, and especially the 2027 season. If I receive any more information about the issue I will be in touch with you again. As always, feel free to contact me with any questions.

Rick