

Chair Taylor, Members of the Committee:

My name is James McEwan I am a former player, team captain and an enforcer a celebrated term used to describe the player on the team that is charged with fighting, from Western Hockey League.

I am here to oppose Bill HB 4093.

I played 4 years in the WHL from the age of 17-20 years old.

One of my big dreams since a young boy, like many Canadian boys, was to play in the NHL.

At 17 years old I got a try out in the WHL.

Eventually the coach and GM of the WHL team said they wanted me on the team and handed me contract with fine print to sign, I hurried to the arena lobby with excitement and got my mom to sign it with me with no legal advice

I was 17 and felt honoured to be picked to play at this level, there where thousands of kids who would want to be where I was.

During my career in WHL I had about 75 fights. I put my body on the line and gave blood sweat and tears for my teammates, coaches, employers, fans and community.

I felt the pressure to fight because if I didn't, I would be replaced or traded.

The league holds a very high standard and players are Required to dress and act like professionals.

We play 72 games a season, practice and trained nearly every day.

Our time and energy were occupied with all the games, practices, work outs, meetings, interviews, weeks on the road, team ordained public appearances and autograph sessions. Day offs where a rare occasion.

It was like working more than a full-time job at the age 17-20.

Because played 1 game in the WHL I was forced to forfeit my NCAA eligibility because the NCAA considers the WHL a professional hockey league and the NCAA is an amateur league. Yet this bill aims to declare players amateurs. What the team is asking the state for is in direct conflict with how they treat the players and how the NCAA views them.

The WHL used pictures, videos and my name to advertise and promote their business for their profit.

I got a small allowance from the team that was barely was enough to pay for all my gas to drive to the rink.

The WHL promotes their school package, which says for every year you play in the WHL, they will pay a year of Canadian University. I supposedly had a 4 years scholarship.

Unfortunately, neither of those options happened because there is a clause in the contract that dissolves the players earned scholarship if they persue a pro career after the WHL.

The team encouraged players to persue a pro career after the WHL and spoke very little on education. As kid I trusted the management, coaches and adults around me. I had very little

options to disagree with them and because they were who I was entrusted to for my care at that time, even if I disagreed I thought I was wrong.

I asked my general manager about getting an agent to help me with the important decisions, legalities of contracts and try-outs and he advised not to and said that he would help me. I listened to him.

I did not end up getting drafted in the NHL but didn't want to give up on my dream.

I pursued my dream and played in the ECHL (a farm team to the NHL) trying to work my way up.

During my time in the minor leagues my salary was about \$500-\$600 a week before tax. A big difference from the NHL league minimum salary of \$500,000.

I sustained many injuries through my hockey career and many of these required surgeries. I had concussions and 2 surgeries in the WHL.

With 75 fights in the WHL I received many blows to the head with no warning or concern from the people around me.

I received lots of praise from management and coaches. Black eyes and stitches are worn with pride. I believed I was doing a good thing at the time because again, these were the adults I was told to listen to. That they would help me.

I had no idea the damages this was causing until my early 20's when I started facing depression, mood swings and thoughts of suicide.

During that time there were 3 suicides from players in the NHL who were all fighters who had their brains examined after death and the degenerative brain disease CTE was found in all of them.

Common symptoms of CTE are: depression, rage, Dementia, mood swings and thoughts of suicide.

The CTE situation is currently an epidemic with many players suffering with the symptoms and unfortunately there is more to come because violence is still tolerated, promoted and praised in the WHL.

When I had to stop playing hockey due to injuries I was told all my scholarship money was gone. I was in a tough spot.

I was injured with no support from any team and no post-secondary education.

I had to borrow money to pay for my own healing: seeing doctors, therapists, medical and health professionals, counsellors and taking personal development courses.

I was doing everything I could to get my life on back on track and ended doing going through debt settlement because of it, which is like going bankrupt.

I am very concerned for the players of the future.

In this junior and professional hockey culture players are being abused, manipulated, exploited and neglected.

Specifically, in the WHL children are still being abused, manipulated, exploited and neglected.

The consequences of allowing and tolerating fighting in hockey is utterly devastating.

Having the power to stop this violence and letting it continue because it profits a small group is cowardly and disgusting.

Violence does not need to be in hockey.
In fact, fighting is not tolerated in some of the best hockey around the world like the Olympics and International hockey leagues.

Yet the NHL and WHL continue to make excuses to let the violence, abuse and exploitation continue.

The WHL is a business about making profits and are doing so from exploiting children who work for these teams.

They give big shiny promises on education packages yet have loop holes that prevent players from getting them.

The owners of these teams make the rules and up until now they have no ones to answer too.

It is imperative that we have regulations in place to protect players health and safety while they are playing and to help them recover from the damages they occurred while playing. HB 4093 would take away the current option for players to appeal their treatment.

It is imperative also to hold the rule makes and employers accountable and to high moral and ethical standard.

The WHL is no amateur league.

I urge you to vote no to Bill HB4093.

Thank You

James McEwan