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Statement from Parent Heart Watch Regarding Recent Opposition on ECG Screening Mandates

Parent Heart Watch exists to prevent sudden cardiac arrest and sudden cardiac death in children and young adults — athletes and non-athletes alike.

A national medical society has expressed opposition to legislative approaches that expand access to electrocardiogram (ECG) screening for student-athletes. Parent Heart Watch respects the role of medical associations in developing clinical guidance. Public policy, however, is designed to address prevention at the population level.

Opposition to Florida's Second Chance Act (Senate Bill 1070) has centered on concerns related to implementation, capacity, and downstream evaluation, rather than on the value of ECG screening itself. It is important to clarify that screening student-athletes under this law does not constitute universal screening. The law expands access to an additional tool for early detection within a defined population already subject to pre-participation evaluations. The Second Chance Act preserves parental choice and informed consent while expanding access to early detection.

Concerns have been raised that focusing ECG screening on competitive student-athletes introduces inequity by excluding youth who are not athletes. Sudden cardiac arrest, however, is the leading medical cause of death during competitive sports. Beginning with student-athletes reflects a data-informed starting point within a population already subject to pre-participation evaluations and represents a practical first step toward broader prevention efforts.

Parent Heart Watch supports expansion of early detection strategies beyond athletes and views the Second Chance Act as a foundation upon which more inclusive approaches should be built. Addressing sudden cardiac arrest across the pediatric population requires phased, scalable implementation grounded in risk, feasibility, and existing infrastructure.

The opposition has also cited concerns regarding workforce capacity, including shortages of pediatric and sports cardiology specialists. Workforce limitations underscore the need for long-term solutions, including expanded training pathways, mentorship, utilization of the pediatric medical home, and investment in the next generation of clinicians, alongside policies that responsibly utilize available resources to improve early detection.

The Second Chance Act further requires that ECG screening be conducted using established standards, including alignment with International Criteria for ECG

interpretation in athletes. These standards are designed to improve accuracy, reduce false positives, and support appropriate follow-up evaluation.

Concerns that ECG screening may unnecessarily delay return-to-play mischaracterize the intent of early detection. The goal of the Second Chance Act is not to restrict participation, but to ensure that young athletes can participate safely. Identifying risk allows for appropriate evaluation, treatment, and, when indicated, safe return-to-play decisions guided by medical professionals.

Prior to enactment of the Second Chance Act, multiple Florida school districts had already implemented policies requiring ECG screening for student-athletes (some districts also included band and JROTC participants, while one district extended screening to sixth-grade students). The law formalized and standardized practices that were already in place, with hundreds having been identified at risk and receiving the appropriate follow-up medical care, including additional testing, surgeries, implantable devices, and/or medications.

Standard pre-participation health histories and physical examinations have a low sensitivity to identify those at risk for sudden cardiac arrest related to undetected underlying heart conditions, particularly when those conditions are silent. Adding a 12-lead ECG improves the ability to identify certain life-threatening cardiac abnormalities earlier.

No screening approach is perfect. However, continued reliance on methods acknowledged to miss a substantial proportion of silent, life-threatening heart conditions accepts preventable risk. The question is not whether early detection identifies every condition, but whether it identifies more youth at risk than maintaining the status quo.

Florida's Second Chance Act addresses primary prevention by identifying underlying heart conditions before sudden cardiac arrest occurs. Florida already leads in secondary prevention through laws requiring CPR training, access to automated external defibrillators (AEDs), and Cardiac Emergency Response Plans (CERPs). These measures can save lives when sudden cardiac arrest occurs.

Early detection and emergency preparedness are not competing strategies. Together, they represent a comprehensive approach to preventing sudden cardiac arrest and protecting young lives by combining primary and secondary prevention.

Parent Heart Watch remains committed to working collaboratively with families, schools, healthcare professionals, and state partners to ensure thoughtful implementation of the Second Chance Act and to advance a future where preventable cardiac deaths are no longer accepted as inevitable.