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(SACRAMENTO, CA) – Assemblymembers Kevin McCarty (D- Sacramento) and Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher (D – San Diego) today announced the “Safe Youth Football Act”, which will protect children from brain injury by establishing a minimum age to play in organized tackle football programs. This bill would follow the advice of medical professions and allow high-contact elements from football programs only at the high school level. This standard will prevent young athletes from sustaining long-term brain damage caused by repetitive tackling, hitting and blocking.

Numerous studies have shown that Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) is caused by repetitive impacts to the head sustained over a period of time and cite sub-concussive impacts as an important factor leading to brain injury. Children who play contact sports during their most critical years of brain development are at a significantly greater risk for neurological impairments and CTE later in life.

Children who wait until high school to play tackle football have a better chance of avoiding the net effects that come with CTE, including depression, memory loss and dementia. Non-contact flag football provides a positive, competitive and safer opportunity to learn the skills necessary to be successful at football. Since 2014, California has worked to strengthen concussion protocols for youth sports. While stricter concussion protocols are certainly a good starting point, they don’t go far enough.

“The research is clear – when children participate in high-impact, high-contact sports, there is a 100% risk of exposure to brain damage,” said Dr. Bennet Omalu, author of the award winning book on CTE, *Concussion*. “Once you know the risk involved in something, what’s the first thing you do? Protect children from it.”

“The science is clear: head injuries sustained at a young age can harm kids for the rest of their lives,” said Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher, a joint author of the bill. “Developing skills through flag football before high school is sound public policy from a health and safety standpoint,”

Non-contact youth football has produced a number of NFL legends including Jerry Rice, Walter Payton, Lawrence Taylor, Jim Brown and Tom Brady.

“The Super Bowl may be over, but the risk of brain injury to kids who play tackle football remains,” said Assemblymember McCarty. “We have an obligation to protect children from dangerous, long-term injuries resulting from tackle football, especially brain trauma. California should follow the lead of football legends like New Orleans Saints’ Drew Brees, who took his concerns for his own kids and created a non-contact youth flag football league. The Golden State’s children need to know that no touchdown or interception is worth long-term damage to their brains caused by tackle football.”

The Safe Youth Football Act will be considered in the spring of 2018. If enacted, California would be the first state in the nation to set a minimum age requirement for youth tackle football. Similar legislation has been proposed in the states of Illinois, Maryland and New York.

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