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FOR RELEASE:

July 18, 2009

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SCALERA/VOSS/PRIETO BILL SEEKING HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS FOR DISABLED, VISUALLY IMPAIRED GOES TO GOVERNOR

*Measure Would Direct State's Interscholastic Sports Group To Encourage & Oversee
'Adapted Athletics' Competitions*

(TRENTON) – The Senate today gave final legislative approval to legislation Assembly members Fred Scalera, Joan Voss and Vincent Prieto sponsored to direct the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) to play an active role in developing competitive sports programs for youths with disabilities or physical handicaps.

“Kids with disabilities who aspire to play sports should get every opportunity to do so,” said Scalera (D-Essex). “All children regardless of physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities or impairments should be able to enjoy the exhilaration of sports and enjoy the thrill of competition.”

The Scalera/Voss/Prieto bill (A-930) is intended to help foster partnerships among different school districts that are large enough to field teams of students who can play “adapted sports” – competitions that are based on mainstream sports but are modified to meet the needs of those with cognitive or physical disabilities.

The lawmakers noted the measure would be of particular benefit to school districts that are serving increased numbers of children with autism and other developmental disabilities or handicaps like visual impairments.

The measure would direct the NJSIAA to work with the American Association of Adapted Sports Programs (AAASP) to establish interscholastic athletic programs for student athletes with physical disabilities or visual impairments or support the efforts of participating school districts that implement adapted athletics programs.

(MORE)

The bill also would require coaches in an adapted athletic program to receive specialized training for that specific program.

“Adapted athletic programs will grant children with physical or cognitive disabilities the same opportunity to enjoy the benefits and values of participating in high school sports competitions that other student-athletes enjoy,” said Voss (D-Bergen).

“It is widely recognized that high school athletics can play a vital role in a student’s development,” said Prieto (D-Hudson). “Adapted sports would help children who live with a variety of challenges meet their full potential.”

The NJSIAA is a voluntary, nonprofit organization of 425 accredited public, private and parochial high schools in the state. The organization sets forth the rules and regulations governing high school athletics to equalize competition for member schools. The NJSIAA conducts tournaments and crowns champions in 31 sports.

The AAASP is a national organization committed to promoting programs for student-athletes with disabilities.

The bill, which passed, 39-0, now heads to the Governor who may sign it, veto it or modify it in the form of a conditional veto.

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