

# Sports Officials Legislative Scorecard

Has your state passed laws related to assaults on officials, officials' liability or independent contractor status? Those three issues impact sports officials and the officiating industry. Many states have realized the importance of addressing those topics.

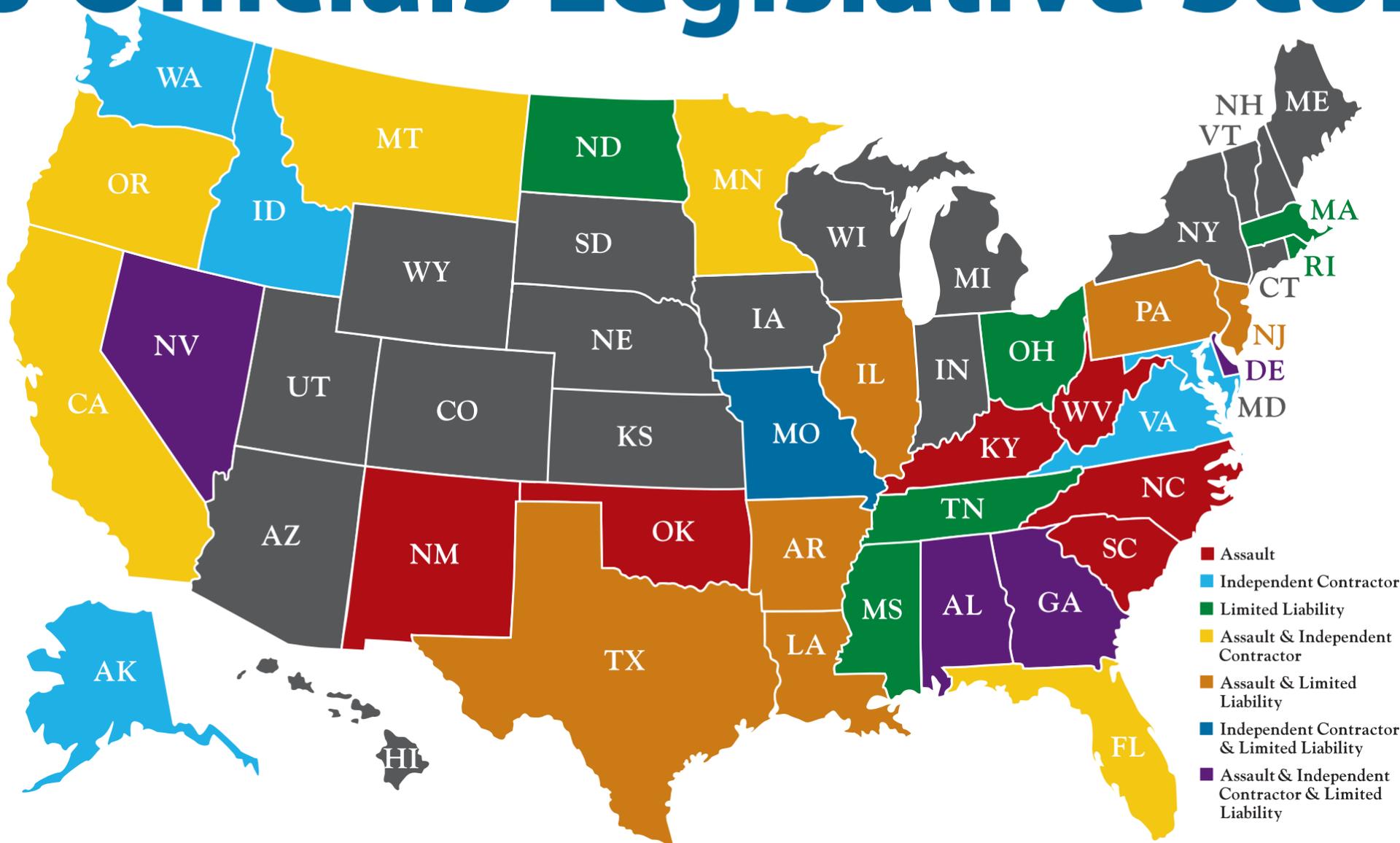
Sports officials should be able to perform their duties without threat of personal injury, administrative hearings or litigation because of their game calls. Being a referee or umpire is no easy task. State legislators can show support for the men and women who officiate on the courts and fields by passing laws to protect them.

NASO has been bringing attention to assault, liability and independent contractor issues for years. The map, updated for 2016, displays the states that have passed laws dealing with those issues. There are currently 21 states that have officiating assault laws (including 19 with criminal laws and two with civil statutes), 16 with limited liability legislation and 14 states with independent contractor laws. How does your state match up with others? If there is work to be done, consider getting involved in pushing for legislation.

## Pass Legislation in Your State

Since 1984, when NASO first submitted model legislation regarding assaults against officials, members and legislators have used such models to construct their own legislative bills.

There is no foolproof plan to get the job done. Each state handles legislation differently, and it is up to the local constituency to manage the process effectively. It is NASO's goal that individual members utilize the proposed legislative models and work with their local officials associations and local legislators to construct viable laws. Before you do anything else, it's a good idea to do some research. Request an NASO Assault Legislation Packet and visit [naso.org](http://naso.org). Contact your



state government to find out what specific legislation is in place. And if your state does not have needed laws supporting officials, you can get involved.

**1. Contact your local association.** Share with your association what other states have done in terms of legislation. Move forward united. You can also work to get other officials associations in the area or your state association to back your cause.

**2. Circulate a petition.** Ask members of your association and area officials associations to sign a petition asking your lawmakers to

take action.

**3. Gather information.** Gather and present information to legislators about incidents that have happened in your state that apply, such as officiating assaults, etc.

**4. Get on the phone or Internet.** Contact your legislators and meet with them to present information that may help to pass the legislation.

**5. Follow up and don't give up.** After talking and meeting with your legislators, follow up with a thank you letter and tell them that you will follow their progress. Keep the

topic in the forefront. Even if a proposed bill doesn't pass the first time, it doesn't mean it won't pass in the future. Take time to gather more support and continue to pursue the legislation at the next opportunity.

## Assault Legislation Information Available Online

For the latest legislation information, visit [naso.org](http://naso.org). There you will find legislation statuses in each state, model legislation and specific state assault legislation.

## State Legislation Actions:

### Texas Liability Bill Signed Into Law

Sports officials in Texas have new liability protections when someone is injured on the field or court thanks to a law passed last year.

House Bill 1040, which was initiated by the Texas Association of Sports Officials (TASO), an independent organization providing support, resources and training for Texas high school sports officials, passed through the Texas State Legislature and was signed into law by Gov. Greg Abbott on June 9, 2015.

The law protects sports officials and officials associations from legal action unless there is gross negligence or wanton, willful or intentional misconduct.

The legislation was prompted by a case in 2006 when an entire Texas football crew and TASO were sued for \$10 million by a workers compensation insurance company following an Oct. 26, 2004, in-game collision between an official and a coach. The coach suffered severe injuries that ended his teaching and coaching careers.

TASO and the officials prevailed in court, getting the lawsuit dismissed, and won a countersuit for a frivolous lawsuit. But securing that outcome took years.

### Iowa Assault Bill Stalls in Committee

An Iowa bill providing enhanced criminal penalties for assaults on sports officials received limited support during a late January subcommittee hearing.

The legislation, which says that a simple assault against a sports official at an athletic event would be prosecuted as a serious misdemeanor, punishable by up to a year in jail and a fine of up to \$1,875, failed to advance in a House subcommittee. However, it remained alive for further debate.

Rep. Megan Jones, R-Sioux Falls, introduced House File 2020 at the suggestion of a constituent who is a sports official.

### Indiana Bill Remains in Committee

Sen. Ron Alting, R-District 22, filed a bill to up the penalty for battery committed against sports officials, but the bill was referred to the Committee on Corrections & Criminal Law and has not progressed.

Senate Bill 97, which was co-sponsored by Jim Arnold, D-District 8, proposed that battery on a certified athletic official be a Class A misdemeanor. As a result, fans, players or coaches could have faced up to a year in jail and a \$10,000 fine. □