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CONTACTS:

Geoffrey Lauer – Executive Director
Brain Injury Alliance of Iowa
319-466-7455
glauer@biaia.org

Carrie Van Quathem – Chair
Iowa Concussion Consortium
515-727-8750
carriev@childserve.org

FULL RELEASE:

Gov. Reynolds Signs New Concussion Legislation to Protect Iowa Students

Earlier this month, after years of intensive advocacy and collaboration among educators, health care professionals, and brain injury advocates in Iowa, the Iowa House and Senate passed expanded legislation to protect Iowa students against long-lasting damage from concussions and other brain injuries. HF2442 passed with unanimous support in both chambers—and this morning Gov. Kim Reynolds signed the bill into effect.

“We are delighted that the governor has recognized the tremendous importance of proper response to concussions. We think parents, teachers, and coaches in Iowa will join us in celebrating this legislation—as it puts important measures in place to help them protect the kids they care about,” says Carrie Van Quathem, who is chair of the Iowa Concussion Consortium and Director of Pediatric Rehabilitation at ChildServe in Johnston, IA.

“We know that brain injuries are happening to kids and teens—thousands each year in Iowa—whether in sports, motor vehicle crashes, or falls. This legislation ensures that their well-being is being monitored carefully, not only by their parents or their family doctor but also when they are at school. It gives them a much better chance at full recovery after a brain injury, and that makes their future brighter.”

The new law will require that a student immediately be removed from an interscholastic activity if a coach, official, emergency medical care provider, or licensed health care provider observes any signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion or brain injury—and the student may only return to sports and activities when he or she has written clearance from a licensed health care professional.

Additionally, the legislation calls for “return-to-learn” procedures, which ensure that a child receives critical supports and accommodations in the classroom during the recovery period after a brain injury. In the best-practice model for concussion management, a gradual “return-to-play” procedure (which guides a safe return to sports activities) occurs *only after* the child has successfully returned to full pre-injury performance in the classroom.

“When concussions are properly recognized and managed within the first few weeks after injury, most individuals recover without lingering symptoms,” says Geoffrey Lauer, Executive Director of the Brain Injury Alliance of Iowa, which spearheaded the Iowa Concussion Consortium (ICC). “The immediate, appropriate, and coordinated response is what it takes to prevent concussions from developing into long-lasting, more severe problems.”

Thomas Brown, an ICC member and chair of the Governor’s Advisory Council on Brain Injuries, says, “The beauty of this legislation is that it protects not only kids injured in the game, but also those who are injured outside of school activities, who may be at risk of ‘Second Impact Syndrome’ due to their participation in sports activities. And the academic, return-to-learn component is an evidence-based practice that’s important to all students, no matter how or where their injuries occur.”

ICC has more than 40 member organizations statewide. The list is growing, as concern and understanding increase regarding the need for consistent, evidence-based information about effective concussion management practices. Members include the Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Department of Public Health, Governor’s Advisory Council on Brain Injuries, Iowa High School Athletic Association, Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union, Iowa Athletic Trainers’ Society, Iowa School Nurse Organization, and Iowa Association of School Boards.

Van Quathem says, “We have been working for years to evaluate best practices and form partnerships to support schools and families in protecting their students. We are grateful to Representative Megan Jones and Senator Amy Sinclair, who championed this legislation demonstrating Iowa’s priority to give our kids what they need to heal when they sustain brain injuries.”

Over the past two years the ICC and its members have adapted, and the Iowa Departments of Public Health and Education have endorsed and distributed, a set of evidence-based return-to-play and return-to-learn protocols for concussion management. This model, first developed in Colorado, is called REAP, which stands for Reduce/Remove • Educate • Accommodate • Pace, and has been recognized internationally as an optimal model for maximizing positive outcomes for youth athletes. While the protocol was developed with athletes in mind, these principles of concussion management may be universally applied as best practices.

REAP is now being used in 12 states across the United States and was originally developed in response to tragedy, when a freshman football player at Grandview High School in Aurora, Colorado, collapsed on the field and died after returning to play too soon after two “mild” brain injuries that occurred within a few weeks of one another. After the devastating loss, attributed to “Second Impact Syndrome,” Dr. Karen McAvoy, the school psychologist at Grandview, conducted a four-year research study in consultation with medical and school professionals and created REAP with the hope of preventing such tragedies through education.

McAvoy has published the REAP manual, which outlines the respective roles played by parents, teachers, coaches, and medical providers in a youth’s recovery after concussion. The REAP manual has been customized for Iowa and is available for download on the ICC website at www.iowaconcussion.org. Additionally, the Iowa Concussion Consortium Speakers’ Bureau is poised to deliver training to schools and community groups across Iowa who seek presentations, in-service events, or workshops to enhance understanding of community-based concussion management, and to help them comply with the new law.

About Iowa Concussion Consortium:

In 2016, the Brain Injury Alliance of Iowa (BIAIA) initiated the formation of the Iowa Concussion Consortium (ICC) program to address the statewide need for reliable information about concussion for Iowans. ICC holds trainings for educators, athletic staff, and medical professionals across the state to implement evidence-based protocols for multi-disciplinary, student-focused concussion management. The initiative promotes critical early response to youth concussion, ensuring that parents, coaches, teachers, health professionals, and other adults in a young person’s life understand and use best practices for avoiding and minimizing lasting effects from brain injury.

About the Brain Injury Alliance of Iowa:

For more than 35 years, BIAIA has embraced a mission to create a better future through brain injury prevention, advocacy, education, research, and support. As the death rate from brain injury has progressively decreased over the past 20 years, the number of survivors has steadily increased. More than 95,000 Iowans now live with long-term

disability from acquired brain injury—a population equivalent to more than the populations of Ames, Sioux City, Waterloo, Council Bluffs, or Iowa City. BIAIA provides a statewide service of Neuro Resource Facilitation, supporting thousands of Iowans who experience brain injury as well as their families and the professionals who serve them.

Website: www.iowaconcussion.org

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