

Alabama's Sports Officials Bill

Alabama has become the 16th state to toughen the punishment on angry sports fans who attack game officials, coaches, and administrators.

The Alabama House voted, 75-1, in December to give final approval to Senate Bill 16, sponsored by Senator Rodger Smitherman (D-Birmingham). The bill, which had passed the Senate earlier by a 31-0 margin, was signed by Gov. Don Siegelman, on December 28, 2001, and becomes law on March 31, 2002.

It creates new crimes of harassing, menacing and assaulting sports officials, coaches and administrators. The punishments are harsher than normal for convictions for harassment, menacing and assault. For example, a second-degree assault can carry a sentence of up to 10 years in prison, but under the new law, a second-degree assault of a sports official, coach, and administrator could result in a sentences of up to 20 years.

The legislation applies to all levels of athletics from church softball to professional sports.