



# PENNSYLVANIA ICE HOCKEY OFFICIATING

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Hello,

We are reaching out to the entire tri-state hockey community to make all parties aware of an important developing situation as it relates to sourcing and providing on-ice officials for games throughout the region. Without question, this pandemic has flipped every aspect of American life upside down. From work, to school, to the grocery store, nothing about the last few months has been easy or typical.

Prior to the pandemic, the USA Hockey Officiating Department's enrollment numbers - both nationwide and locally - had been trending steadily downward for many years. This was attributed to a wide variety of factors, including the generally hectic nature of American life, as well as the increasing mistreatment of officials in all youth sports. Despite these challenges, and thanks to the diligent work of PIHO's scheduling staff and the unwavering commitments of our independently-contracted officials, our organization has consistently been able to staff all games for our partners with qualified officials - some of whom travel great distances in order to ensure games can be staffed fully and played safely.

This pandemic has made an already challenging situation that much more difficult. **Officiating enrollment in USA Hockey's Mid-American District is reportedly down approximately 50% from where it was at this time in 2019** - and that is just the registration figures (individuals that have simply paid USA Hockey to enroll) and does not account for those that have registered, but are not yet certified to officiate (attended seminar, completed online modules, open & closed book test, SafeSport training, Mid-Am Screening, etc.). We expect enrollment to decrease even further come December 1, 2020, at which time officiating certifications obtained last season will expire, and those officials who have not been able to meet the new season's registration requirements will be decertified and ineligible to officiate. We also expect further declines come January 1, 2021 when many officials' Pennsylvania Act 15 certifications, obtained in 2015 when the requirement was first instituted, will expire.

**As of October 2020, nearly 60% (191) of PIHO's 321 registered officials have not yet skated a game this season - not for lack of opportunity, but rather they are affirmatively choosing not to officiate this season.** We find this is mostly because of Covid-19 concerns, issues relating to unemployment compensation benefits and eligibility, or because the pandemic has forced them to re-prioritize their lives and free time. Regardless, the result is that PIHO, and every other assignor and assigning organization in the country and locally, are having a tremendously difficult time locating officials to officiate games, especially games in outlying areas.

We bring these historically low participation figures to light because we greatly value our relationship with the local hockey community, which has been positive and mutually beneficial from day one. It is important that we manage expectations as well as work collaboratively to solve, or at least mitigate, this ongoing problem, which is likely to worsen as the season intensifies, the weather turns, and if/when the pandemic grows. PIHO is doing everything in our power to call upon our multi-state database of officials to get all games covered – and covered competently. The fact of the matter is that this may not always be possible, as independently contracted officials cannot be forced to work, nor should they be.

We ask for your flexibility and understanding for situations that may arise if/when only one official appears for a non-checking classification game, or if games need to be postponed or even cancelled due to a lack of available officials. This is already happening with hockey in other parts of the country and we expect it to happen in our region as the previously mentioned dates and deadlines loom ahead. Similarly, we ask for your patience and understanding for the inevitable situation in which a less-competent official works a higher-level game than what they are accustomed to. There are bad and missed calls in every game and at every level. This year, there will be more – plain and simple. The alternative, however, is that games are not played at all.

We also request your help in getting these games covered. Whenever possible, organizations should avoid scheduling single game slots – particularly at younger levels of competition. Games scheduled in sets of two, three or more helps PIHO make the trip to the rink more financially appealing to potential officials. Likewise, please ask parents and coaches to dial back the criticism and complaints about the quality of officiating, both during and after games, as this only exacerbates the supply problem. The relatively few officials who are willing to work through the pandemic are going to be overworked and less experienced. They will get better, eventually, with practice. In the short-term, we cannot afford to have angry coaches and unruly parents chase them away from the rink. We need them. You need them, too, or else we cannot play.

It is unfortunate to bear additional bad news in a year that has already had way too much of it, but it is important for us to be candid and open with the local hockey community so that we can all prepare for and address the problem together. Hopefully, as Covid-19 therapeutics and vaccines roll out, officiating enrollment will increase. Until then, please be flexible and patient as we do everything in our power to supply games throughout the tri-state area with quality officials.

Thank you.

Zachary Roberts  
Executive Director  
Pennsylvania Ice Hockey Officiating