

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

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U.S. House of Representatives | Committee on Education and Workforce

Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education

Hearing: "Field of Fees: Private Equity's Role in the Commercialization of American Youth Sports"

June 30, 2026

Chairman Kiley, Ranking Member Bonamici, and distinguished Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. My name is Seth Lieberman, and I am the founder and CEO of Ankored, a company that helps youth-sports organizations keep children safe by managing background checks, abuse-prevention and SafeSport training, certifications, and compliance. We work every day with the clubs, leagues, parks-and-recreation departments, schools, camps, and national governing bodies that make youth sports possible. From that vantage point, I want to offer the Subcommittee one central message:

A clear, consistent, and standard set of safety requirements for youth sports would sharply reduce the real cost of play, eliminate countless hours of wasted effort, and, most of all, better protect our kids.

No system, however expensive, will stop every injury or every instance of abuse. But that is precisely why this matters. Because we cannot eliminate risk, we are obligated to mitigate it, and to build systems that surface problems quickly. The question is whether our current approach actually does that, or whether it simply spends enormous money and effort while leaving children less protected than they should be.

Safety Is the Core of Sport

Safety is the core of sport. We ask families to hand us the most precious thing in their lives and trust that their child will come home whole, in body and in spirit. That trust is the product. A league can have the best fields, the best coaching, and the best competition in the state, but if a parent cannot be confident that the adult standing beside their eight-year-old has been properly vetted and trained, none of the rest of it matters. Every benefit youth sports deliver, from physical health and confidence to teamwork, belonging, and a safe place to be after school, depends on one precondition: the child has to be safe to receive them.

This is why safety cannot be treated as overhead. When we talk about the commercialization of youth sports and the rising cost of play, the instinct is to look for fat to trim. But the screening, training, and compliance that protect children are not fat. They are the very thing the system exists to guarantee. The question this Subcommittee should ask is not whether safety is worth the cost. It is why we have built a system that makes safety so needlessly expensive and difficult to deliver.

A Patchwork of Requirements Creates Dangerous Friction

Today there is no coherent national framework for keeping kids safe in youth sports. Instead, an organization faces a fragmented and often contradictory set of obligations that varies by state, by

locality, and by the type of program. Consider just a few of the requirements that govern child safety on the field:

- **Background checks.** Every state defines an “approved” check differently. Disqualifying offenses, lookback periods, and renewal cycles all vary, and some states require fingerprint-based identification while others accept name-based or state-only searches.
- **Concussion training.** All fifty states have enacted youth concussion and “return-to-play” laws, but no two are alike. They differ in their training mandates, their sign-off and clearance requirements, and the rules for who must be certified and how often.
- **Heat illness and heat-stroke prevention.** Some states mandate specific heat-acclimatization protocols, hydration breaks, and emergency action plans. Many do not, and the ones that do rarely align with one another.
- **Abuse-prevention and SafeSport training.** The federal SafeSport framework governs Olympic and Paralympic sports, but state child-abuse-prevention and mandated-reporter laws impose separate and differently scoped obligations, and each national governing body adds its own. This is exactly the kind of safeguard that should be standard for every adult who works with children. Today it reaches only some of them, and only inconsistently.

Now layer on the fact that the setting changes the rules entirely. A high school athletic program answers to its state athletic association and education code. The same child playing the same sport on a Saturday rec-league team is governed by a completely different set of municipal and league requirements. Sign that child up for a summer sports camp, and a third regime applies: state camp-licensing and health-and-safety rules with their own staff-screening and training mandates. One child, in one sport, in one season, can be subject to three or four overlapping and sometimes conflicting compliance systems, none of which talk to each other.

This patchwork produces friction, and that friction both opens safety gaps and drives up cost. The two compound each other.

Start with the safety gaps. Every point of friction is a place where a child can slip through. When a volunteer-run club has to reconcile four different definitions of an approved background check, track separate concussion and heat-safety certifications, complete overlapping abuse-prevention trainings, and navigate a dozen disconnected portals (re-collecting the same documents every season because nothing carries over), corners get cut. A coach is waved onto the field “just for today” while paperwork is pending. A lapsed certification goes unnoticed. A check run in one jurisdiction is assumed to be good in another where it is not. A required heat or concussion protocol is missed because no one was sure which of the three applicable rulebooks controlled. Complexity does not produce safety. It produces gaps, and gaps are where incidents happen.

Then there is the cost. Every one of those same friction points carries a price tag, and the bill lands on the organizations and families who can least afford it. The patchwork drives up administrative costs: the staff time, software, and consultants spent interpreting and reconciling conflicting rules instead of serving kids. It burns volunteer hours, as coaches, board members, and registrars chase forms and re-enter the same information into systems that do not connect.

And it forces families to pay twice, three times, or more for the same protection, because a valid clearance earned in one program is rarely accepted by the next. None of that duplicated spending buys a single additional unit of child safety. It is pure waste: money and time that could go to scholarships, equipment, facilities, or simply lower fees.

Let me be direct about the stakes. A fragmented compliance regime does not just generate paperwork. It generates more risk, more incidents, more children getting hurt, and higher costs, which is the opposite of what each individual rule was written to achieve. The same fragmentation that frustrates a well-resourced operator can be catastrophic for the small, community-based program that has the fewest staff and the least margin for error.

The Hidden Tax: Higher Costs and Fewer Volunteers

This Subcommittee is rightly focused on the affordability of youth sports and the forces driving up the cost of play. Safety fragmentation is one of those forces, and it operates as a hidden tax that falls hardest on the programs least able to bear it.

Cost. When safety is hard to verify and easy to get wrong, risk rises, and insurers price that risk. Carriers see inconsistent screening, lapsed trainings, and incomplete records, and they respond with higher premiums, larger deductibles, more exclusions, or by leaving the youth-sports market altogether. The organization pays more for coverage, and that cost passes directly to families through higher registration fees. A parent in a recreational league may never see the words “compliance patchwork” on their bill, but they are paying for it.

Volunteers. Youth sports in this country run on volunteers: the parent who coaches, the retiree who referees, the neighbor who manages the roster. These are exactly the people the compliance burden drives away. When signing up to help means navigating multiple portals, paying out of pocket for redundant background checks, and re-doing the same trainings across every organization a family touches, good people simply decline. Every volunteer we lose to administrative burden is a coach a child does not get, a team that does not field, or a program that does not open. Fewer volunteers also means the adults who remain are stretched thinner and supervised less, which again raises the risk to children.

There is also a competitive dimension worth this Subcommittee’s attention. A fragmented, high-friction safety regime quietly advantages the largest and best-capitalized commercial operators, the ones who can hire compliance staff and absorb the overhead, while burdening the volunteer-led community clubs that serve most American kids and charge the least to play. If we care about keeping youth sports affordable and locally rooted, reducing this friction is not a side issue. It is central.

A Path Forward

None of this is an argument for less safety. It is an argument for coherent safety: replacing a costly, conflicting patchwork with clear, consistent, and portable standards that protect children without crushing the volunteers and small organizations who serve them. We respectfully encourage the Subcommittee to consider steps that would:

1. Encourage harmonized baseline standards for background checks and abuse-prevention training across youth sports, so that a properly vetted adult is recognized as such across jurisdictions and governing bodies;
2. Support portability and reciprocity, so that a clearance or certification earned in one program or state does not have to be purchased and completed all over again in the next;
3. Recognize the disproportionate burden these requirements place on volunteer-run, community-based organizations, and design any federal guidance to reduce, rather than multiply, the number of disconnected systems they must navigate; and
4. Treat child-safety compliance as core infrastructure for youth sports, the foundation that makes affordable, broadly accessible play possible, rather than as a discretionary cost to be cut.

At Ankored, we see every day that when safety is made simple, more children get to play, more affordably, with more volunteers, and with far less risk. No framework will ever prevent every injury or every act of abuse. But a clear, consistent, and standard set of safety requirements would sharply reduce the real cost of play, eliminate countless hours of wasted effort, and let us catch and respond to problems faster than we can today. Most of all, it would do the one thing every one of these rules was written to do in the first place. It would better protect our kids. That is the prize, and it is well within this Committee's reach.

I thank the Subcommittee for its attention to youth sports and for the opportunity to contribute to this important conversation. My colleagues and I at Ankored stand ready to serve as a resource to the Committee as it continues this work.

Respectfully submitted,

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