

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Tim Murphy**  
**Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**  
**Hearing on “Concussions in Youth Sports: Evaluating Prevention and Research”**  
**May 13, 2016**

*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

We are here today to continue the Committee’s ongoing examination of concussions. This hearing follows an initial roundtable that we had in March, where we had a constructive dialogue with leading experts in the field about how to address the challenge of concussions. Today’s hearing will focus on youth sports, specifically areas of prevention and research.

While there is always some risk of injury, participating in sports, particularly at a young age, has shown to have many benefits. The benefits of youth sports participation include better health through increased activity, improved academic achievement, physical skill-building, and social development, to name a few.

Estimates suggest that more than 30 million children, ages 5 to 18, participate in organized sports each year. Despite this being the largest population of athletes, this group is one of the most underserved populations when it comes to the level of awareness, prevention and research related to head injuries.

This brings us to our task for today. We want to examine what is being done today to reduce the incidence of head injuries in young athletes. What policies and guidelines are currently in place to limit the risk of injury? How are these policies developed and do they go far enough? What educational and training policies exist for athletes, coaches, and parents? How does the large number of disparate leagues, teams, clubs and recreational opportunities available to young athletes complicate efforts to improve injury prevention?

While youth sports are not nearly as far along as many professional leagues, progress has been made in recent years. All 50 states and the District of Columbia have enacted concussion laws and some youth sports organizations and leagues – such as Pop Warner Football, USA Hockey, US Soccer, to name a few - have implemented policies to reduce the amount of head contact in practices and games. Others – such as USA Football - provide education and guidance to enhance training and awareness for coaches, parents, and athletes. A number of these groups are represented here today and I look forward to hearing how their efforts are affecting the safety of their respective sports. Based on their experience, thus far, are we doing enough? What does the science tell us?

This last question is particularly interesting and important. There is a lot we do not know about concussions, generally, but pediatric populations, including youth sports, are severely underrepresented in existing research. And therein lays the challenge – the public wants answers that the science is not ready to provide. We have much to learn about how concussions and repetitive head injuries affect younger individuals, both immediately as well as later in life. Therefore, I am interested to learn more how youth sports organizations develop, review, and update their policies, guidance, or educational efforts in light of the limited, but rapidly evolving, research on concussions. If we don’t know how traumatic brain injury affects our youth, it makes it that much more challenging to protect them.

Adding to the challenge, we currently lack any form of effective injury surveillance, including concussions, for athletes younger than high school age. Given the large number of athletes, teams, leagues, and other recreational opportunities, this is a daunting task. But if we do not understand the magnitude of the challenge, how different factors – such as age, gender, sport, socioeconomic status, etc. – influence outcomes, how can we ensure we are making the best decisions for our kids?

This morning on our first panel, we are joined by two mothers – Ms. Kelli Jantz and Ms. Karen Zegel – both of whom tragically lost their sons as a result of injuries sustained while playing youth sports. Ms. Jantz’s son, Jake, was a promising freshman athlete at Grandview High School in Aurora, Colorado and is the namesake of Colorado’s “Jake Snakenberg Youth Concussion Act.” While Ms. Zegel’s son, Patrick

Risha, was a star running back at Elizabeth Forward High School, in my district, and played football from the moment he could pick up a ball. We greatly appreciate their willingness to share their stories, as it reminds us why it is so vital that we continue to examine this issue.

Later, on our second panel we will have Dartmouth's Head Football Coach, Buddy Teevens, and representatives from some of the sports organizations – USA Football, USA Hockey, and US Lacrosse– that oversee or provide guidance to youth sports leagues. We will also hear from Practice Like Pros to learn more about additional options for keeping athletes safe. Additionally we have prominent researchers in this field that will be able to speak to how we can improve research and surveillance, better monitor injuries, and minimize the risk of injury based on the science.

I appreciate all of our panelists for joining us this morning. This is an important issue and your perspectives are important to advancing the public dialogue on these complex injuries.

I also would like to thank Ranking Member DeGette for her support on this initiative and look forward to continuing our efforts on this endeavor. I now recognize the Ranking Member for five minutes to deliver her own remarks.

###