

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

(As Prepared for Delivery)

This hearing marks the second event of the committee’s comprehensive review of concussions. We first had a roundtable discussion in March that highlighted not only the gaps in our scientific and medical understanding of these injuries but also the risks they pose to all members of society. These injuries occur not only on the field of play or in service to the nation, but also in the school yard, in auto accidents, or even something as simple as slipping on a patch of ice. They do not discriminate.

There are no easy answers when it comes to head trauma. It may take time for research to provide the concrete answers the public demands but that is not an excuse for inaction. There has been tremendous progress in the last decade but we can, and must, do more. And this must be a collective effort as no one individual, group, or organization can solve this public health challenge.

We are here today to examine what is being done to protect one of the largest at-risk populations for concussions, youth athletes. Every year, in Michigan and across the country, tens of millions of children compete in youth sports. From community recreational teams to elite travel clubs, children have countless opportunities to engage in athletic competition. These activities provide tremendous benefits to our children, influencing their physical and psychological health, academic performance, and social well-being – both now and in the future.

Despite these benefits, with everything we see in the press about concussions and the long-term effects of head injuries, countless parents are asking themselves, is it safe for my child to play sports?

This is a difficult question to answer. To start, we know relatively little about the prevalence, effects, and long-term outcomes of concussions or head injuries in pediatric populations, including youth sports. This group has been dramatically underrepresented in existing research. Do children respond differently than adults? How does the developing brain respond? Does it heal faster or does it create long-term effects? These are just a few of the many questions science simply cannot answer at this point.

In the absence of scientific answers, we look for opportunities to limit exposure to head injuries. Due to the nature of concussions, management of these injuries is difficult even in controlled settings such as pro sports where you have individual leagues with a limited number of teams and athletes. At the youth level, there are thousands of leagues, organizations, and clubs – making the challenge exponentially more difficult and harder to control. The adoption and enforcement of rules, policies, or education programs often depends on the commitment of individual leagues, teams, coaches, parents, and athletes.

Some progress has occurred in recent years as a number of leagues and organizations are taking steps to limit contact in practice and games. Others are conducting outreach and education to improve awareness and understanding for coaches, parents, and athletes. Whether these efforts are effective or go far enough remains a question and one that we should continue to evaluate. Collectively, however, these efforts reflect a growing shift in the culture of

sports regarding concussions and head injuries. Today's discussion is an important step in the right direction.

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