

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Innovation, Data, and Commerce Subcommittee Hearing on “Taking the Buzzer Beater to the Bank: Protecting College Athletes’ NIL Dealmaking Rights.”

March 29, 2023

The devotion, sacrifice, and hard work of collegiate athletes help make college sports one of the most popular and lucrative brands of sports entertainment in the country. Their play packs stadiums. Their performance fuels viewership. Their talents and charisma drive merchandise sales. Their successes increase revenue and enrollment. College athletes deserve a system that protects their interests and well-being while preserving the educational mission of college sports.

That’s why I am pleased that the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has finally been forced to allow college athletes to monetize their name, image, and likeness just like any other student on campus or coach in the locker room. While name, image, and likeness reform is a start, any future actions by Congress to legislate in this space must also address some of the broader, equally pressing issues affecting college athletes today. Issues like health and safety, players’ right to organize, compensation, and gender equity.

We must ensure that players’ welfare is the top priority for the athletic programs at colleges and universities across the country regardless of division, conference, or sport. That means every player must receive proper care for sports-related medical issues, even when that care comes after leaving college. It means college athletes’ first amendment right to organize must be respected and protected, and that players must be able to meaningfully negotiate to ensure their voices are heard. And it also means we must be mindful of protecting and building on the benefits Title IX has brought to women’s college sports.

I thank Chair Rodgers and Bilirakis for their willingness to work in a bipartisan manner and ensure all perspectives are represented here today. These athletes deserve a system that puts player welfare first, not the NCAA’s bottom line. I look forward to hearing from this panel on how we in Congress can achieve that goal for all collegiate athletes.

I would like to yield the remainder of my time to Congresswoman Trahan – a leader on these issues, and the only former Division I female athlete serving in Congress today.