

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Innovation, Data and Commerce Member Lori Trahan

Innovation, Data, and Commerce Subcommittee Hearing on “NIL Playbook: Proposal to Protect Student Athletes’ Dealmaking Rights”

January 18, 2024

Well, thank you Ranking Member Pallone. I'm grateful to you and to Ranking Member Schakowsky for ensuring that we have witnesses that truly represent the breadth of athlete experiences in college sports. Today, athletes' perspectives are extremely important. In fact, I would argue the most important as this committee considers legislation that directly affects athletes' rights.

However, as many current or former college athletes will tell you – it's their voices that are often sidelined in conversations about the future of the multi-billion-dollar industry built on their hard work. For decades, athletes were told that the rules and policies governing their lives were in their best interests – that they were meant to protect them – when they really fostered a system that rewarded everyone except those creating the value.

But times have changed. Athletes have more power today than ever before. And despite what may be said by some here today, that's a good thing. I trust athletes because, as a former D-1 volleyball player, I know what the opportunity to play the sport you love at the school of your dreams means to you. I trust athletes because I've talked to them, and I've heard their stories about sending NIL money home so that parents could pay their bills or using it to put food on their own table when the dining hall is closed.

The last thing this committee should be considering is legislation that would limit those opportunities. Instead, we should be working together to solve the real issues facing athletes today, issues like international athletes not having NIL rights, Title IX loopholes robbing women athletes of roster spots, and outdated health and safety standards that fail athletes. So I'm disappointed that none of those problems are addressed by the legislation featured in today's hearing and that the majority rejected Democratic requests to include my bicameral NIL legislation, *the College Athlete Economic Freedom Act*.

I urge my colleagues to work together to find compromise on this issue. It's more important that we get it right rather than rush through a one-sided proposal that doesn't meet the needs of hardworking athletes. I yield back.