

Meredith Page- Written Testimony`

01/18/2024 Subcommittee on Innovation, Data, and Commerce

“NIL Playbook: Proposal to Protect Student Athletes’ Deal Making Rights”

Chairman Bilirakis, Ranking Member Schakowsky, and distinguished members of the House Subcommittee on Innovation, Data, and Commerce, thank you for the opportunity to testify at this important hearing today.

My name is Meredith Page, and I am a junior on the women’s volleyball team at Radford University where I am currently studying business management. Becoming a student athlete in 2021, truly changed my life. I have seen myself grow from an unsure girl to a confident woman with the empowerment of college athletics. Often a small decision leads to greater things and I can enthusiastically say that my decision to join Radford’s student athlete advisory committee (SAAC) was one of those momentous decisions. By the end of my freshman year, I had been named our SAAC President and my passion for student athlete advocacy was born. Fast forward a year later and in addition to still being Radford’s President, I was now chair of the Big South Conference SAAC and was named the NCAA D1 SAAC Big South Representative. Both my institution and my conference extensively demonstrate the value they place on the student-athlete voice and have inspired me to do the same. I have been honored to be a member of the Radford Athletics Leadership Team where I participate in bi-weekly meetings, share the perspective of my fellow athletes, and learn from our administrators as they navigate operating our athletic department. My first exposure to the values of the Big South came as I attended my first Big South Leadership Conference. The attention given to learning from their athletes at that

conference demonstrated the high regard they place on the student athlete experience. As my involvement in the conference has grown so has the opportunities afforded to me including a seat in conference CEOs, athletic directors, senior women administrators, and faculty athletic representative meetings and eventually, a seat on Division One SAAC.

D1 SAAC is dedicated to enhancing the student athlete experience by protecting student athlete wellbeing, fostering a positive image and inclusive environment, and promoting student athlete engagement at the national, conference, and institutional levels. Encompassing student athlete representatives from each of the 32 division one conferences, we represent over 190,000 student athletes. The NCAA is dedicated to our integration into the governance structure and all leadership committees to ensure that the student athlete voice, from student athletes themselves, is not lost.

I am incredibly grateful to the chairman for including protections against athlete employment status. Division One SAAC is unified in your pursuit of these protections.

An employment model presents many unknowns about the future of what collegiate athletics looks like with many questions to consider: Would institutions cut athletic programs to fund the revenue generating sports? How would this impact Title IX protections? What would happen to athletic scholarships? What does this do to the status of international student-athletes? Many of these questions are at the forefront of the minds of student-athletes and need to be resolved before any new model is implemented.

I urge to you to take action as the employment model causes grave concern for other athletes to have the ability to do the same thing I have. To grow, to prosper, and acquire an education.

Scholarship or not, the character and career development gained by the student athlete

experience is a privilege and one we see in abundance through leadership positions across the country.

The student athlete experience prepares individuals, from all walks of life, to write their own story. The elimination of athletes by classification of employment would be detrimental to the framework of college athletics and the dreams of the youth athletes across the country.

Swimming, volleyball, tennis, soccer, track and field, and the rest on the long list of non-revenue generating sports cannot be forgotten. It is easy to lose touch with who is behind those titles.

Future doctors, lawyers, scientists, CEOs, and most importantly, the next generation of leaders.

They do not deserve to get lost in the narrative.

The NCAA, excelling under Charlie Baker's leadership, has taken great action to the protection of student athletes. Though the effectiveness is dimmed by a patch work of state laws. Having a national framework will allow for uniformity for every student-athlete to be protected to pursue their athletic careers under the same rules, regulations, and consequences. Where we can finally put the emphasis back on the education, not the paycheck.

Uniformity is key. A cohesive set of rules ensures that every student-athlete, regardless of their program or location, can benefit from their NIL without unnecessary complications. Guardrails help maintain the integrity of collegiate sports while offering student-athletes the chance to capitalize on their personal brand. It's not just about the present, but also about creating a sustainable and fair system for future generations of student-athletes. By advocating for uniformity, we can contribute to an environment where every student-athlete has an equal opportunity to navigate the realm of NIL.

After all, when the integrity, fairness, and competitiveness of collegiate sports deviate, student-athletes are the ones impacted.

I am eager, alongside my peers, to collaborate with you and your colleagues to ensure the best interest of student athletes are at the center in the legislative process. I greatly appreciate your attention to this matter.

Thank you for your dedication to public service and your commitment to the betterment of college sports.