

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade Member Robin Kelly

Hearing on “Moving the Goalposts: How NIL is Reshaping College Athletics”

March 4, 2025

Thank you, Chair Bilirakis and Ranking Member Schakowsky, and thanks to all the witnesses for their participation.

One thing I hope we can all agree on is that college athletes deserve a system that protects their well-being and interests. However, while the rapid evolution of college athletes benefiting from their Name, Image, and Likeness rights may feel chaotic to the NCAA, the conferences, and the universities, it has provided enormous benefits to college athletes. By contrast universities are now navigating a truly unpredictable environment when it comes to funding for vital academic and research programs. I am deeply concerned about the potential impact of proposed cuts to funding for the National Institute of Health (NIH). That’s one of the real crises that this Committee should be focused on. Last month, the Trump Administration issued an executive order that would drastically lower the agency's funding for major research institutions across the country. The policy, currently blocked by a federal court, would limit NIH research funding for "indirect costs" to 15%, which is far below what most universities receive and what they need to support their programs.

NIH funding is not limited to elite universities like Northwestern University or the University of Chicago; it supports institutions across the entire country, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), small universities, and large Division 1 schools. The misconception that NIH funds only benefit top-tier universities overlooks the critical support these funds provide to a wide range of institutions in both Republican and Democratic districts. For example, HBCUs, MSIs and HSIs receive hundreds of millions of dollars in 2024 to support vital medical research. These funds are essential for maintaining research buildings and labs, covering administrative costs, purchasing supplies and equipment, and paying support staff. NIH grants are a lifeline for many universities, ensuring that research and education can thrive at institutions of all sizes and backgrounds.

The reduction in NIH funding is a financial earthquake and would directly affect college athletes as well. Research in sports medicine, head injury prevention, and athletic performance relies on federal funding, much of which comes from the NIH. If this funding is reduced or eliminated, it will only create more challenges for college athletes and hinder the development of critical programs that protect their health and safety.

Of course, the impact extends far beyond athletic injuries. NIH funding of clinical trials and other medical research is vital in ensuring that all populations are represented in our nation’s

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biomedical research. For medical breakthroughs to occur and be truly effective, they must include diverse participants, reflecting a range of racial, ethnic, and gender identities. Therefore, the need for inclusive research is not only a matter of fairness but of public health.

We simply cannot afford to have the well-being of our students- whether in the classroom, in a research lab, or on the field- be compromised by unnecessary funding cuts by the Trump Administration. We must continue to support our universities, including their research initiatives, to ensure they remain centers of excellence for ALL students.

I have an article from the Washington Post to enter into the record titled - Hiring freezes, fewer grad students: Funding uncertainty hits colleges. I urge my colleagues to remain mindful of the larger funding issues that could jeopardize the future of both education and research in this country.

Thank you.

I yield back.