

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade Ranking Member Jan
Schakowsky

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

March 4, 2025

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for coming in today. College sports is a multi-billion-dollar business accounting for over \$18 billion in revenue in 2022. But college athletes are seeing only a small fraction of that money which was generated through their hard work. We must protect and support the athletes at the center of the industry. Through their tireless advocacy and activism, college athletes have won the right to be compensated through deals for their name, image, and likeness (NIL).

As college athletes continue to fight for more rights and protections, I support those college athletes and their allies who insist that any discussion of how NIL is reshaping college athletics is misguided if we do not also discuss expanding medical coverage for college athletes, improving health and safety standards, recognizing college athletes’ right to labor protections, and strengthening Title IX enforcement.

Rather than centralizing power within the NCAA, the wealthiest athletic conferences, and the universities, any proposal this Subcommittee considers must be built around the needs and rights of athletes. This means prioritizing their health and safety, ensuring fair compensation, and upholding their right to organize. Some states have already taken the lead in establishing strong health and safety provisions for student athletes. Maryland, for example, has mandatory protocols for preventing, assessing, and treating brain injuries and heat-related illnesses - reforms spurred by the tragic death of Jordan McNair, a young football player who lost his life to heatstroke. This type of state legislation should inform and direct this committee as we extend enforceable health and safety standards to protect athletes from similar tragedies nationwide.

However, as our committee discusses the NIL landscape, we cannot ignore the existential financial crisis looming over universities across the country. The National Institutes of Health, or NIH, research cuts to our nation’s Universities and Colleges, as proposed by the Trump Administration would not just cripple critical healthcare research but stifle innovation and disrupt our nation’s 70 year old University and Federal partnership model for critical research. Recent studies also point out that this is not just an issue for research institutions but has far-reaching effects on local economies and potentially taxpayers as well.

Universities rely on NIH grants to fund faculty, graduate research positions, infrastructure, and core lab operations like hazardous waste removal. If we are serious about the future of college sports, we must also be serious about preserving the financial health of the universities that sustain them. I have always believed that we must protect athletes’ health, their right to organize, and their ability to receive fair compensation for their labor, and I will continue

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to fight for those protections while preserving NIL rights for college athletes. But as the very institutions college athletes compete for begin to falter, protecting college athletes now also means reversing these dangerous NIH cuts.