

HEARING BEFORE THE UNITED STATES HOUSE JUDICIARY SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE
ADMINISTRATIVE STATE, REGULATORY REFORM, AND ANTITRUST

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

Written Testimony of Caryl Smith Gilbert

Director of Men's and Women's Track & Field, University of Georgia

Chairman Fitzgerald, Ranking Member Nadler, and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Good morning. My name is Caryl Smith Gilbert, and I am the Director of Men's and Women's Track & Field at the University of Georgia. It is an honor to testify before you today as we examine the current state of college athletics.

Track & field is one of the most diverse and accessible sports in the world, offering educational opportunities to women, underrepresented students, and international athletes. For more than 25 years, I have coached and developed student-athletes, including Olympians and national champions. Without scholarships, many of these athletes would not have the opportunity to attend college at all. And I speak from personal experience. Neither my husband nor I would have been able to afford the college education we received without an athletic scholarship. We both agree that our college athletic experience saved our lives.

The student-athletes I coach are not just competitors—they are students pursuing an education and an opportunity to build a future beyond sports. For most, scholarships are the only way they can afford a college degree, and obtaining a college degree is truly the most important thing. To be clear, the number of athletes who are able to have a long and lucrative professional career in track and field is infinitesimally small. So, my goal is to ensure that they achieve their potential on the track and in the classroom so that they are prepared for life after college athletics.

Yet, today, track & field and other non-revenue sports are at risk. The current NIL environment—without a clear uniform national standard—threatens scholarships, undermines roster stability, and creates uncertainty for athletes, coaches, and programs. Of equal importance, implementing an employment model would be devastating for non-revenue sports. Today, our student-athletes receive critical resources—nutritionists, athletic trainers, academic advisors—at no cost. But as employees, they would be responsible for many of these expenses themselves. And for non-revenue sports like track and field, the student athletes aren't making lucrative NIL deals that can support them past college. Instead of providing more opportunities, an employment model would make it harder for young athletes to compete while pursuing a degree. And a college degree provides young people with a lifetime's worth of support.

My view on NIL is different from coaches in revenue-generating sports. Unlike those sports, where NIL deals can be lucrative, my athletes earn little to no NIL money. Instead, they rely on scholarships, academic support, and university-provided resources to train and compete at an elite level. If I am correct in my concerns about the future of college Olympic sports programs, the U.S. Olympic developmental

program will be seriously damaged. I know this because, in sports like track and field and swimming, college programs are the Olympic development program. This isn't theoretical—of the 118 athletes who competed for Team USA in track & field during the Paris Summer Olympics, 114 developed through the college system. Only four did not. That speaks to the critical role that college athletics plays in Olympic athlete development.

My personal fear is that without regulation, all money will be spent on football, and the impact on non-revenue and Olympic sports will be devastating. I am concerned many universities will eliminate many Olympic sports programs, depriving countless students of the same opportunities that I experienced thanks to college track and field.

To ensure the future of college athletics remains strong and equitable, I urge Congress to protect universities from excessive litigation which diverts necessary money from our athletes, and to prevent student athletes from being classified as employees, as doing so would force schools to defund and ultimately eliminate non-revenue sports.

I am grateful for the Committee's attention on this critically important issue and urge you to pass legislation to establish uniform rules that will minimize the chaos and maximize the opportunity for student athletes, especially for those in non-revenue sports, to be able to attend college, compete athletically and graduate with a valuable college degree.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your questions.