

Written Testimony of Mikayla Pivec

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Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

*Hearing: "Don't Fumble Their Future: Positioning Student-Athletes
for Success in School and Beyond"*

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the committee.

My name is Mikayla Pivec. I'm a professional basketball player, and former All-American at Oregon State University, where I was the captain who led our team to an Elite Eight and two Sweet Sixteens before being drafted into the WNBA. I'm now the co-founder and organizing director of the United College Athletes Association (UCAA): a players association that gives college athletes a real voice to secure a system that is safe, fair, and sustainable for generations.

I grew up in Washington and fell in love with basketball in 3rd grade after my Dad took me to a Seattle Storm game. Players like Sue Bird, Lauren Jackson, and Candace Parker inspired me to chase my dreams, so every night, I made my dad rebound for me for hours. By the time it got dark, he'd want to sleep and I'd always say: "just one more, Dad. Just one more." And we'd countdown like I was hitting a buzzer beater in March Madness.

My work ethic took me to the next level. I led my team to the Elite Eight in front of millions on ESPN. I even competed against Sue Bird and Team USA. I was no longer on the playground with orange slices from mom and participation trophies for everyone. I sacrificed everything to compete at this level because I love our game. But that's not why I'm here today. I'm here today because the NCAA has failed and continues to fail to respect and protect college athletes.

When I was in college, I was working over 50 hours a week on my sport while earning less than \$8 an hour from a \$1,600 monthly stipend.¹ I DoorDashed and collected cans to pay bills.

Basketball was more than a full-time job and the university had complete control of my schedule. NIL has helped some players, but most still earn less than \$10/hour and struggle to pay for basic necessities. The lack of protections goes way beyond money.

My senior year, I had a foot injury that needed surgery. Every step felt like I was walking on a nail. I kept requesting an MRI, but they denied me every, single, time. I kept playing because I love the game, but in retrospect, I was denied the information I needed to make a decision about my own health. Right after graduating, I also needed a knee surgery and had to pay for it out of pocket. I had a professional injury, but received amateur medical care from the NCAA.

My story is not unique. I've had conversations with thousands of athletes across the country and constantly hear the same stories of players pushed to play through serious injuries, broken bones, and even concussions. That's business as usual for the NCAA.

This hearing is titled "Don't Fumble Their Futures" — but the truth is, the NCAA has fumbled athletes' futures for generations. My grandmother was forced to play half-court basketball because institutions like the NCAA believed women were too weak for full-court. When Title IX passed, the NCAA sued to block it.² It hasn't even been four years since the NCAA finally allowed women's basketball to use the term "March Madness" after being shamed by the weight room scandal.³ Now, only 7% of colleges are in compliance with Title IX and the NCAA is spending millions to lobby for the SCORE Act, which would strip athletes of labor rights, silence their voices, and give the NCAA a bailout.⁴ The NCAA has repeatedly fumbled our futures — so why would Congress even remotely consider entrusting the NCAA with a bailout?

The NCAA has professionalized every part of our game, except the rights and protections of the athletes who are at the center of its growth. The NCAA's business is professional, but its structure is amateur, which is why it needs to follow the lead of every professional sports league by negotiating a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) with a players association.⁵

A CBA is the best way to make college sports safe, fair, and sustainable for both athletes and universities because they can negotiate a solution that is fair for both sides. Athletes get enforceable protections like safety mandates, academic freedoms, and fair pay; while universities get enforceable rules like salary caps, transfer limits, and tampering restrictions. That's why athletic directors at Tennessee, Ohio State, TCU, San Diego St., and Boise St. support a CBA.⁶

Finally, Congress should NOT pass the SCORE Act or any legislation that limits athletes' labor rights. Instead, I support the College Athlete Right to Organize Act (CARO) introduced by

Senator Sanders, Senator Murphy, and Senator Warren. I also commend the bipartisan leadership of Senator Cantwell and Senator Schmitt through their College Sports Competitiveness Act, which protects women's and Olympic sports.

I want every little girl in the stands watching college athletes to know that when it's her turn, she'll step into a system that protects her as a person, educates her as a student, and empowers her as a professional. That's what current and future generations deserve. Anything less would let them down and empower the NCAA to keep fumbling their futures.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

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1. *Pac-12 Conference*: Student-Athlete Time Demands, Penn Schoen Berland (2015)
 2. *Women's Sports Foundation*: History of Title IX (2019)
 3. *The 19th News*: Women's basketball is finally getting equal treatment in NCAA Final Four branding (2022)
 4. *Sportico*: College Title IX Gender Equity Compliance Is a Failure, Feds Say (2024)
 5. *Supreme Court*: *NCAA v. Alston* (2021)
 6. *The Dallas Morning News*: TCU Athletics Director Sees Need for College Athletes at Negotiating Table (2026)