

Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

United States Senate

Statement of

Collis Temple, Jr.

LSU Board of Supervisors, Small-Business Owner, Former Collegiate Athlete

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Chairman Cassidy, Ranking Member Sanders, and honorable Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on the ongoing effort to best position collegiate student-athletes for success in the classroom and beyond.

My name is Collis Temple, Jr. I am a small-business owner and currently serve as a member of the Louisiana State University Board of Supervisors. I am also a former student-athlete at LSU, where I had the honor of being part of the men's basketball program. My experience as both a student-athlete and now as a businessman and leader within higher education has given me a unique perspective on the evolving landscape of collegiate athletics.

I am here today to emphasize the importance of preserving the fundamental principles of college athletics while adapting thoughtfully to the modern challenges facing student-athletes.

Core Principle: Student First

I want to begin by grounding my remarks in what I believe is the most important principle guiding this conversation: the preservation of the student-athlete model. College athletics, at its core, is an extension of the educational mission of our institutions. First and foremost, student-athletes are students pursuing degrees, developing life skills, and preparing for futures that extend far beyond their time in sports. Athletics should enhance that educational experience, not replace it with a professional employment framework that fundamentally alters the role of higher education.

Maintaining that balance is essential not only to the integrity of college athletics, but, more importantly, to the long-term success of the young people participating in it. Academic engagement must remain central. Student-athletes should be expected to attend class, remain accountable for their coursework, and make meaningful progress toward degree completion. Universities have a responsibility to ensure that athletic participation complements the education of the student, rather than replacing it altogether.

At the same time, I understand that participation in college athletics carries with it an expectation of commitment. Student-athletes benefit from environments that emphasize discipline, teamwork, and accountability. They should honor the commitments they have made to their teams and coaches and compete to the best of their ability, unless limited by legitimate health concerns. Decisions about participation should be grounded in the long-term well-being of the student-athlete, not short-term financial considerations. Stability within programs benefits both institutions and the student-athletes themselves. Collegiate athletics should continue to foster team commitment, discipline, and responsibility.

Equally important is the need to support the whole student-athlete, particularly in the area of behavioral health. Today's student-athletes face pressures unlike any previous generation. They are navigating the complexities of name, image, and likeness opportunities, increased public visibility, constant scrutiny through social media, and unrelenting performance expectations, all while managing the demands of academic and athletic performance. Many are also coping with injuries, the uncertainty of their athletic futures, and the reality that the vast majority will not continue into professional sports.

These pressures can have serious consequences, including increased risks of depression, substance abuse, and other behavioral health challenges, including increased risk of suicide. From my experience, it is clear that institutions must expand and strengthen behavioral health resources to ensure that student-athletes are supported as whole individuals, not simply as performers on the field or court. Providing access to counseling, mental health services, and proactive support systems is not optional—it is essential.

In addition, we must do more to prepare student-athletes for life after sports. The vast majority will transition into careers outside of athletics, and they should leave their institutions equipped with the tools necessary to succeed. This includes not only academic preparation, but also financial literacy, career readiness, and leadership development. The evolving landscape of college athletics, particularly with the introduction of NIL opportunities, makes this preparation even more critical. Student-athletes must understand contracts, tax obligations, and long-term financial planning to ensure they can make informed decisions that benefit them well beyond their college years.

Guardrails Needed to Stabilize College Athletics

As college athletics continues to evolve, it is also clear that reasonable guardrails are needed to maintain stability. The current environment, particularly around the transfer portal, has created significant challenges for both athletes and programs. While student-athletes should retain the ability to transfer, establishing clear windows and reasonable structure can help reduce constant roster turnover and preserve a sense of continuity and commitment within teams.

Similarly, as NIL opportunities expand, there is a growing need for greater oversight and education around agent representation. Young student-athletes should be protected from exploitation through appropriate standards, certification requirements, and guidance. Institutions have a role to play in ensuring that athletes are supported with the knowledge and resources necessary to navigate these new opportunities responsibly.

Policy Considerations

Finally, I would note that the current landscape of college athletics is increasingly fragmented, with varying rules and legal interpretations across states and conferences. There is value in considering whether a thoughtful framework could provide greater consistency, establish clear expectations, and reduce uncertainty for institutions and student-athletes alike.

As part of that discussion, we must be careful in considering proposals to redefine student-athletes as employees. While well-intentioned, traditional labor models were designed for professional work environments and may not align with the educational mission of our colleges and universities. The goal should be to strengthen protections and support for student-athletes while preserving their status as students.

At its best, college athletics offers young people an extraordinary opportunity to grow—not only as athletes, but as students, leaders, and individuals prepared for life beyond sports. The challenge before us is to ensure that, as the system evolves, we protect and enhance that opportunity rather than fundamentally change its purpose.

I appreciate the Committee's attention to these issues and your commitment to supporting student-athletes across the country. If there is an opportunity to contribute further to efforts that preserve the student-athlete model while strengthening behavioral health and life-preparation supports, I stand ready to assist.

Thank you for your time and consideration.