

HEARING BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

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Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Graham and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you all today.

The mission of the NCAA is to provide a world-class athletics and academic experience for student-athletes that fosters lifelong well-being. During my short tenure as president, the NCAA has and continues to [make changes](#) to do more for college athletes. The Association now provides all student-athletes access to post-eligibility health insurance for injuries and mental health concerns that occurred while playing for their university. Additionally, earlier this year, Division I schools vastly expanded the scope of benefits and protections for college athletes by implementing new core guarantees. Division I schools (and Division II and III schools that compete in Division I sports) must:

- Provide medical coverage for athletically related injuries for at least two years after graduation.
- Cover out-of-pocket medical expenses (co-payments, deductibles, etc.) during a student-athlete's playing career.
- Offer degree completion funds for up to 10 years after a college athlete's eligibility concludes.
- Guarantee athletics scholarships and not reduce, cancel or fail to renew athletics aid for any reason.
- Provide education and resources for current and former college athletes across a range of topics, including mental health; name, image and likeness opportunities; financial literacy; career counseling; sexual violence prevention; and transfer opportunities and requirements.
- Comply with consensus-based guidance on health, safety and performance support around cardiac care, mental health and concussion safety protocols.

Another essential priority of the Association and its members is coordinating and delivering safe and fair competition. As legalized sports betting has become more prevalent in states across the country, so too have increased reports of integrity concerns and harassment of coaches and student-athletes — often related to sports betting.

Unlike professional athletes, college students attend classes, live in dormitories and eat in the dining halls, providing ready access to their fellow students and fans, some of whom may be gamblers. An NCAA survey of 18- to 22-year-olds found 67% of students living on campus are sports bettors. In addition, 41% of college students who bet on sports have

placed a bet on their school's teams. Another NCAA survey of campus administrators in 2023 found 10% of Division I respondents were aware of student-athletes being harassed online or in person by someone with gambling interests. In problem gambling education sessions on campus, approximately 1 in 3 student-athletes in sports that are frequently bet on report receiving betting-related harassment. Sports betting is on the rise, and with it, so is the risk for college athletes. Harassment threatens the integrity of the game, and it threatens the well-being of college athletes everywhere.

To protect college athletes against the risks of sports betting, the NCAA has partnered with industry experts to enact common-sense rule updates, provide education, study and understand harassment with an eye toward prevention, monitor the integrity of competitions, and advocate for state laws changes that address these concerns. The NCAA believes the federal government can support positive change in the sports betting space by developing a clear federal definition of sports-betting-related harassment, empowering state regulators to prohibit betting by those who engage in harassment and encouraging states to use and share prohibited bettor lists, as well as make data available to sports leagues and associations when integrity issues arise.

INTEGRITY CONCERNS

Protecting NCAA competition and student-athlete well-being from the dangers of sports betting is of paramount importance to the NCAA. Monitoring integrity concerns over match-fixing, point-shaving, insider information and other schemes is a major focus. The NCAA has taken numerous steps to prevent and detect integrity issues related to sports betting:

- The NCAA employs an industry-leading service provider to monitor collegiate sports betting in the global betting marketplace. This includes monitoring of regular and postseason competition and enhanced monitoring of officials. These efforts began in 2018 with more than 13,000 contests monitored annually. As college betting markets have increased into sports like volleyball, softball, baseball, lacrosse and others, so too have our monitoring efforts. We recently expanded monitoring to more than 22,000 contests per year.
- The NCAA recognizes that officials are targets for potential point-shaving schemes. The NCAA conducts robust background checks and provides targeted education to more than 20,000 officials across all sports with betting markets.
- Many changes have been made through our infractions and student-athlete disciplinary processes to emphasize the significance of integrity violations, while providing flexibility for student-athletes who may get caught up in less severe betting violations.
- The NCAA keeps open lines of communication with many state gambling regulators and various domestic and international sport integrity services and actively participates in the FBI's Sport Integrity Working Group.

While some aspects of having a regulated sports betting marketplace are working to uncover issues such as these, it's clear that significantly more attention should be dedicated to the collegiate sports betting environment by state and federal lawmakers, regulators and betting operators to protect collegiate athletics competitions and student-athlete well-being from the dangers of pervasive sports betting. The NCAA supports leagues and associations having stronger lines of communication with sports regulators — which includes the sharing of data and other pertinent information related to integrity issues.

HARASSMENT RECEIVED BY STUDENT-ATHLETES

Student-athletes have voiced their concerns about angry bettors and the abuse inflicted by them:

- Former North Carolina men's basketball player Armando Bacot [told reporters](#) after an early-round March Madness game, "It's terrible. Even at the last game, I guess I didn't get enough rebounds or something. I thought I played pretty good last game, but I looked at my DMs, and I got like over 100 messages from people telling me I sucked and stuff like that because I didn't get enough rebounds." Bacot added, "I think it's definitely a little out of hand." [March 2024]
- Auburn football player Payton Thorne [said on a podcast](#) that angry bettors request money from him on Venmo when he doesn't play well, adding, "It's funny, when they lose money, they want the money back, but when they win money on the parlay, no one's ever saying they want to pay the money." [September 2024]
- Division I Student-Athlete Advisory Committee Vice Chair Meredith Page wrote in an October 2024 [release](#), "Online abuse of student-athletes is a significant issue that negatively impacts the experience of young athletes across sport, including intercollegiate athletics. The DI SAAC calls on those in a position of influence to take active steps in providing better protections for our young adults."

COACHES VOICE CONCERNS OVER HARASSMENT

Head coaches across the country are concerned that bettors are harassing their student-athletes:

- "I have to say something because I think it's just necessary at this point," University of Dayton men's basketball head coach Anthony Grant [told reporters](#) just days after Ohio legalized sports betting in 2023. "There are some laws that have recently been enacted, that really to me — it could really change the landscape of what college sports is all about. And when we have people that make it about themselves and attack kids because of their own agenda, it sickens me." Grant's comments were cited by Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine when he [announced](#) his support of a rule change to ban prop bets in the state. [January 2023]
- "Online abuse and cyberbullying have no place in our society or college athletics," Purdue men's basketball head coach Matt Painter [said](#). "Thousands of student-athletes across the country face harassment every day on social media, and the bullying can affect their mental health well-being, causing stress, depression and

suicidal thoughts. The increased exposure to online gambling only exacerbates the online abuse, with many student-athletes receiving death threats via social media. We are asking all social media companies and platforms to do more to identify and remove these online threats and make their platforms safer for everyone.” [October 2024]

- “I’ve seen firsthand the negative impacts of social media abuse on the mental health of myself and my loved ones,” [said](#) Connor McCaffery, men’s basketball assistant coach at Butler. “There must be more done to address this toxic behavior impacting sports at all levels.” [October 2024]

PROP BET ADVOCACY

Since the NCAA’s state sports betting advocacy efforts began, four states — Louisiana, Maryland, Ohio and Vermont — have banned individualized college prop bets through commission orders. Additionally, New Jersey and [North Carolina](#) have introduced legislation to ban individual college prop bets, with New Jersey’s bipartisan [A4905](#) recently passing out of committee [unanimously](#). While progress has been made, there is still much work to be done. Approximately 20 of the soon-to-be 39 states (and Washington, D.C.) that have legalized sports betting allow college prop bets in some capacity. Operators might argue that removing bets is unprecedented or that the black market will be flooded with these types of bets — but that is not supported by data. In states that have never allowed college prop bets, there is no evidence that black markets there are flourishing. Furthermore, the operators this year acknowledged removing bets that raise integrity concerns can be done swiftly. After a [scandal](#) involving prop bets in NBA games, every major sportsbook [removed](#) certain prop bets on two-way/10-day NBA players (per a request from the league office). State legislators and regulators, and even the operators, recognize that banning prop bets is a tangible action to help protect student-athletes.

ANTI-HARASSMENT ADVOCACY

Earlier this year, [West Virginia](#) joined [Ohio](#) as states to pass legislation codifying anti-harassment measures related to sports betting. The NCAA worked closely with members of the West Virginia House of Delegates, which recognized that anti-harassment issues are not just statewide, but also impact student-athletes and game officials across the country. The actions of a bettor in one state could impact individuals in another. The delegate who proposed the legislation represented areas bordering Pittsburgh and noted the limited impact of involuntary exclusion bettor lists if bettors could jump across state lines to circumvent penalties. In addition to legislative action by West Virginia and Ohio, a former student-athlete in the [New Mexico](#) Legislature proposed increased penalties for bettors who engaged in harassment related to sports betting. Just recently, the Wyoming Gaming Commission voted to approve rule changes that would expand the definition of harassment and allow regulators to place those who harass student-athletes on involuntary exclusionary bettor lists. A Wyoming Gaming Commission official said, “We are excited to take this first step and be a part of the solution.” Finally, legislators in New Jersey have introduced bills in both the [Senate](#) and [Assembly](#) that would create a harassment hotline, require operators to report harassment and coercion to the New Jersey Division of Gaming

Enforcement, and solicit input from governing bodies, conferences and schools for the governor's annual report on sports betting. Ultimately, having a clear, federal standard for what constitutes harassment related to sports betting would benefit state gaming commissions who have attempted to address this independently through bills and rule changes. Additionally, we encourage the federal government to empower state regulators to ban bettors who engage in harassment through the use of prohibited bettor lists — which should be shared across state lines so offenders do not fall through the cracks.

STUDENT-ATHLETE EDUCATION

The NCAA is doing more now than ever before to support student-athletes. In October, the NCAA [called](#) on fans and social media platforms to curb abuse following the release of the first online harassment [study](#) with Signify Group. Analysts reviewed more than 72,000 messages that were flagged by their AI-based algorithm from a wider dataset of 1.3 million posts/comments targeted at the social media profiles of student-athletes, coaches and officials taking part in seven NCAA championships and the College Football Playoff National Championship. The review found 12% of all abuse was related to sports betting, with more than 740 instances. As betting markets increased, so did the prevalence of harassment, with 19% rates in men's basketball and football.

- As of Aug. 1, all schools with Division I sports programs must provide mental health counseling and mental health services consistent with the NCAA's Mental Health Best Practices.
- The NCAA has expanded its in-person and e-learning content to educate student-athletes on how to handle abusive threats, as well as addressing the risks of sports betting and problem gambling more broadly. Working with platforms and leaders in the space, the NCAA has reached over 100,000 student-athletes to date.
- The NCAA is advocating for social media platforms to address the root of the problem by more proactively identifying and removing abusive content directed at student-athletes.

Thank you for including the NCAA today in your discussion on an important topic that affects student-athletes in all your states. Our hope is that this hearing will shine light on these key issues impacting student-athletes that deserve Congress' attention.

I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.