

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

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March 15, 2016

Mr. Roger Goodell
Commissioner
National Football League
280 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Goodell:

Yesterday, the Committee on Energy and Commerce held a roundtable on the science surrounding concussions and subconcussive hits. The roundtable highlighted work by Dr. Ann McKee of Boston University and her research linking the type of repetitive head injury inherent to football to chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a neurodegenerative brain disease. According to her remarks, Dr. McKee has found CTE in 90 of the 94 National Football League (NFL) players' brains examined at Boston University's Brain Bank.¹ Dr. McKee has also found CTE in 45 out of 55 college players and 26 out of 65 high school players who have donated their brains to the Brain Bank.²

After hearing from Dr. McKee about the risks posed by repetitive brain trauma, Rep. Jan Schakowsky asked Jeff Miller, Senior Vice President of Health and Safety for the NFL, for the League's perspective:

Rep. Schakowsky: Mr. Miller, do you think there is a link between football and degenerative brain disorders like CTE?

Mr. Miller: Well, certainly Dr. McKee's research shows that a number of retired NFL players were diagnosed with CTE, so the answer to that question is certainly yes.³

¹ *In stunning admission, NFL official affirms link between football and CTE*, Washington Post (Mar. 14, 2016).

² *Id.*

³ Committee on Energy and Commerce, *Roundtable on Evaluating the State of Concussion Research and Implications for Public Health*, 114th Cong. (Mar. 14, 2016).

Mr. Miller's acknowledgement represents a significant break from the NFL's previous refusal to acknowledge a connection between football and the brain disease. For example, as recently as February 4, 2016 – three days before the Super Bowl – Dr. Mitchel Berger, a member of the NFL's Head, Neck and Spink Committee, denied there is a link between football and degenerative brain disorders.⁴

We are encouraged by the NFL's willingness to accept the science linking the repetitive hits inherent to football with CTE. We seek to better understand whether this new attitude will translate into additional actionable measures to prevent repetitive brain trauma in current players, encourage programs and protocols to protect children in the youth leagues, and provide support for current and retired players at risk of this disease. The NFL's leadership on this issue can serve as a guide to other professional sports leagues and youth sports organizations seeking to limit risks for their players.

To assist our inquiry, please provide the following information and respond to the following questions by March 29, 2016:

1. What new programs, initiatives, and protocols will the NFL consider implementing to protect players from the risks of repetitive head trauma, including CTE?
2. What new programs, initiatives, and protocols will the NFL consider implementing in its affiliated youth league, USA Football, to protect children from the risks of repetitive head trauma?
3. As Dr. Ann McKee stated at the forum, "The other thing I want to emphasize in this discussion is it's not about concussions. It's about limiting head injury—head injury that occurs on every play of the game at every single level of this game. We have to eliminate somehow the cumulative head impacts."⁵ What changes is the NFL considering taking to address the risk posed by the over one thousand subconcussive hits each player may experience over the course of a season?
4. How does the League intend to make sure that coaches, parents, and youth players are aware of the link between football and CTE?
 - a. What specific actions does the NFL intend to take to communicate the risks of routine subconcussive hits in football through its existing partnerships and initiatives, such as the youth membership program Heads Up Football and the "Moms Football Safety Clinics" directed at the mothers of youth football players?

⁴ *The NFL Still Won't Tackle Brain Trauma at the Super Bowl*, TIME (Feb. 6, 2016).

⁵ Committee on Energy and Commerce, *Roundtable on Evaluating the State of Concussion Research and Implications for Public Health*, 114th Cong. (Mar. 14, 2016).

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Your assistance in this matter is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, please contact Una Lee or Elizabeth Letter of the minority committee staff at (202) 225-3641.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member



Diana DeGette
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and
Investigations



Jan Schakowsky
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce,
Manufacturing, and Trade



Gene Green
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health