



COMMITTEE ON *DEMOCRATS*
ENERGY & COMMERCE
RANKING MEMBER FRANK PALLONE, JR.

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**Statement of Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr., as prepared for delivery
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Roundtable Discussion on Concussions**

I want to thank all of our participants for joining us today. Concussions are a critical public health issue affecting millions of people each year.

We have strong indications that the effects of repeated brain trauma – even those received during one’s youth – can accumulate, with consequences that are long-term, debilitating, and even life-threatening.

These consequences can stem from injuries once considered minor, known as subconcussive hits. Recent studies show that athletes exhibit evidence of significant brain damage due to hits to the head even when they do not suffer concussions.

For example, the work of a group of researchers out of Purdue University found significant structural changes to the brains of high school football players, even among those who did not have a concussion diagnosis. What is particularly troubling is that these changes persisted even 12 months later, suggesting lasting damage.

Many other studies have documented an association between subconcussive hits and significant changes in brain chemistry, decreased brain functioning, behavioral changes, and the release of biochemical markers linked to brain damage.

Researchers have also repeatedly found evidence of a linkage between head impacts and the degenerative brain disease known as CTE. CTE is a devastating disease associated with memory loss, confusion, impaired judgment, depression, and eventually, dementia.

I am honored to welcome Dr. Ann McKee here today from Boston University. She and her colleagues from the university have been conducting groundbreaking research into understanding and defining CTE. They have examined the brain tissue of dozens of deceased former NFL players, as well as individuals playing football at the collegiate and even high school levels.

They have discovered the presence of CTE in former athletes as young as 25 years old, and in many adults who have played football since they were kids. They have confirmed that CTE is a unique disease with a unique signature. And their work has culminated in a broad scientific consensus defining the characteristics of CTE.

It's unfortunate that Dr. McKee's work has been questioned by those who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

I understand the unwillingness to acknowledge the linkage between contact sports and brain damage—it is an inconvenient truth that some of our great national past times, the sports that we love and that our children play every day, may cause significant and lasting brain damage.

But it is time to accept the mounting evidence that there is a linkage between head impacts and brain damage, and it is time to do something about it. While there is research that still needs to be done in order to answer all the questions, this should not be an excuse for inaction. We should be examining not only the state of the science, but also looking to how we can apply what we know right now – to protect our service men and women, our athletes, and our kids.

As we explore the state of the science at our roundtable, I hope our focus today is on finding a path forward. I hope that our discussion will not serve to cause confusion or to obscure the scientific consensus around repetitive head trauma and the dangers that it poses.

I am also pleased that Chairman Upton and Chairman Murphy agreed to invite Lisa McHale here today. Ms. McHale is not only the director of family relations for the Concussion Legacy Foundation, which does truly critical work in advancing the science of concussions and CTE, but she's also the wife of former Tampa Bay Buccaneer Tom McHale, who had CTE.

It is especially valuable to hear from Lisa about her experience with CTE. Her experience, and the experiences of others like her, must inform the research agenda and the path forward to address this disease.

Chairman Upton, let me conclude my remarks by suggesting respectfully that while this roundtable is a valuable start to our work, we should see it as that—a start. We need to hold hearings on this subject. Given the gravity of this topic and the number of lives it affects, an informal process is simply insufficient.

That's why I am sending a letter to Chairman Upton, asking that we jointly expand the Committee's exploration of the causes, effects, treatment, and prevention of concussions. I have proposed a series of four Committee hearings that would give concussions and sports-related head trauma the attention they deserve as critical public health issues. I hope we can work together moving forward and find a way to plan future hearings.

Thank you again to all of our participants for your contributions and for helping us get started on our comprehensive review.

Thank you to Chairman Upton and Chairman Murphy for convening this forum. Today's forum is only the beginning. I hope we can all continue to work together to find the best ways to address this significant public health issue in order to protect those that are most likely to be impacted.

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