



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

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Pallone Remarks at Mixed Martial Arts Hearing

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection hearing titled, “Perspectives on Mixed Martial Arts:”*

Today’s hearing is on Mixed Martial Arts or MMA, a full-contact sport that has risen in popularity over the last several years. And youth interest in the sport has followed, which concerns me. MMA camps start for children as young as age 6, and this year a 15 year-old fought against a 23-year old in a sanctioned match in Montana. I am hoping we can spend some time today talking about participation of kids and teens in this sport.

For several years, this Committee has been following the issues surrounding sports and head trauma. Most recently, Democratic members held a forum last month with our Judiciary Committee Democratic colleagues on the long-term effects of football-related brain injuries.

While much of the attention on sports and head trauma has focused on football, head injuries from MMA are real and concerning. An MMA fighter was diagnosed post-mortem with CTE last year, and retired fighters who are still living have reported headaches, forgetfulness, loss of train of thought, and other effects that are similar to Alzheimer’s disease.

We have known for some time that getting hit in the head is simply not good for you. But we are learning more and more about the effects of cumulative hits to the head over time, and how head trauma is particularly dangerous to our youth.

Adults need to know the full long-term risks so they can make informed choices to participate in contact sports. But I am most worried about the risks to children. Studies show that brain injuries in children can be more serious. We need to focus on how we can reduce the risks for children who engage in MMA.

It’s been less than a year since our Subcommittee’s last hearing on MMA in December 2016. While these hearings are raising legitimate issues that deserve to be heard, I would be

remiss if I did not raise another sports issue deserving Committee review. There is another revolution in the world of sports: the exploding popularity of sports betting.

Sports betting is more popular and widely accepted than ever before. Despite that, it's still illegal in most of the country. A majority of Americans now believe that sports betting should be legal. And since it is happening anyway, we should ensure that basic consumer protections are attached to it.

I have released a comprehensive bill to update our outdated federal gambling laws, the Gaming Accountability and Modernization Enhancement (or GAME) Act. My bill allows states that put strong consumer protections in place to legalize sports betting and online gaming if they choose to. It would increase transparency and integrity in the industry and could bring in much-needed revenue.

Mr. Chairman, I think this is an issue where Members on both sides of the aisle can find common ground, and as I've said to you before, I hope to see the Committee hold hearings to consider my bill in the near future.

Thank you and I yield back.

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