



COMMITTEE ON
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Pallone Opening Remarks at Democratic Forum on the Effects of Football-Related Brain Injuries

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Democratic Forum on “Addressing the Long-Term Effects of Football-Related Brain Injuries:”*

I want to thank all of our participants for being here today at this joint Energy and Commerce and Judiciary committees Democratic forum. Additionally, I’d like to thank Judiciary Committee Ranking Member Conyers for joining me to examine the long-term impacts of repetitive brain trauma, in particular trauma associated with contact sports. I look forward to engaging in a dialogue with our witnesses about this very important issue.

Every week at this time of year, football players at all levels take the field and engage in a contact sport that they enjoy playing but that may be harmful to their health in the future. There are a lot concerning questions that we will discuss today. At the very least athletes and their families need to know that they are being informed about the health risks, and that the risks associated with contact sports are being mitigated to the greatest extent possible.

With more and more research coming out, the evidence is becoming clearer and clearer: the effects of repeated head trauma – even those received during one’s youth – can accumulate and cause serious and devastating conditions. And these conditions can stem from injuries once considered minor, known as subconcussive hits, or repetitive hits to the head.

Boston University researchers, led by our witnesses today, Dr. Ann McKee, Dr. Bob Stern, and Dr. Chris Nowinski, have found that exposure to hits, regardless of whether a concussion occurred, is associated with a markedly increased risk of mood disorders like depression.

These researchers have also repeatedly found evidence of a linkage between head impacts and CTE, a devastating degenerative brain disease. Most notably, in a major study released this summer, these researchers examined the brains of 111 deceased National Football League players whose families chose to donate their brains to the Boston University

program. The study showed that 110 of the deceased players suffered from CTE during their lifetimes.

I am pleased that we are joined by all three of these researchers who are conducting critically important research. Their research must be considered by athletic associations and others, including Congress, as we look for real solutions to this devastating disease. I thank them for their invaluable contributions in this area, and look forward to hearing more today.

Beyond this research, there are a number of unanswered questions about what risk factors make individuals more susceptible to these debilitating conditions. We need to understand what happens in the brain when it's hit, and how many hits trigger these neurological effects. We also need to investigate whether it is possible to diagnose CTE during life, and what treatments should be offered to those struggling with cognitive issues due to cumulative brain trauma.

While there is still research that needs to be done, that should not be an excuse for inaction. What is not in dispute is the association between head trauma from contact sports, such as football, and lasting brain damage and degenerative diseases like CTE.

A number of our panelists today have played professional football, or have family members who did. I want to welcome former NFL players Harry Carson, DeAndre Levy and Mike Adamle. We're also joined by Mr. Adamle's wife, Kim Adamle and Dr. Eleanor Perfetto, who is the widow of the late NFL player Ralph Wenzel. They have witnessed first-hand the long-term effects of exposure to repetitive head impacts. They can speak to the challenges they live with, and have witnessed, as a result of this trauma. They can also speak to their concerns for the future, and whether they believe they will be adequately supported by the NFL or other organizations as they face future challenges. I'd also like to mention that we invited the NFL to attend, but they declined.

The science has raised enough red flags about the dangers of repetitive head trauma that I think it is incumbent upon those who organize and promote contact sports to take every effort to make the games as safe as possible.

That commitment must come from all levels of play, including from the highest level of football. Since the NFL recognizes the link between repetitive hits and brain trauma, they need to commit to supporting independent research, meaningfully reducing the risks, and supporting players suffering from the effects of long-term brain injury.

This forum is critically important. It is unfortunate, however, that this discussion is not being conducted in a formal Congressional Hearing. Despite our repeated request for a series of hearings on this subject last year, the Republican Majority agreed to one hearing during the last Congress on concussions in youth sports. That is simply not enough, but I'm hopeful that today's forum will help us build momentum for further action and discussion.

Thank you again to all of our witnesses for your contributions and for being here for this important discussion on traumatic brain injuries in athletes. I hope we can all continue to work together to find the best ways to address this significant public health issue.

And now I'd like to call on the Ranking Member of the Judiciary committee, Congressman Conyers for an opening statement.

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