

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

Majority (202) 225-2927

Minority (202) 225-3641

August 23, 2016

Mr. Scott Hallenbeck
Executive Director
USA Football
45 N. Pennsylvania St.
Suite 700
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Mr. Hallenbeck:

Last month, news reports revealed that USA Football's Heads Up program, designed to improve player safety and minimize the risk of head injury, has no demonstrable effect on concussions, contrary to what USA Football has claimed publicly. This recent disclosure raises concerns about the safety of youth football and whether reliable information is available to youth football players, parents, and coaches for them to make informed decisions about participation in the sport.

USA Football was founded by the National Football League (NFL) and the NFL Players Association in 2002 to encourage youth participation in football.¹ In 2013, USA Football introduced the Heads Up Football program to youth football organizations to educate players and coaches on elements of the game and to improve player safety.² The following year, the NFL gave a \$45 million grant to USA Football to expand the Heads Up program.³

In 2014, USA Football asked the Datalys Center for Sports Injury Research and Prevention to conduct a study monitoring injury rates in the program. In February 2015, Datalys reported its preliminary findings to USA Football, showing that Heads Up Football resulted in 76

¹ *N.F.L.-Backed Youth Program Says It Reduced Concussions. The Data Disagrees.*, New York Times (July 27, 2016).

² House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Testimony of Dr. Andrew Gregory, *Hearing on Concussions in Youth Sports: Evaluating Prevention and Research*, 114th Cong. (May 13, 2016).

³ *NFL gives \$45 million grant*, Associated Press (Mar. 24, 2014).

percent fewer injuries, 34 percent fewer concussions in games, and 29 percent fewer concussions in practices.

USA Football has repeatedly touted these figures as evidence of Heads Up Football's success in improving player safety. At an Energy and Commerce Committee hearing on concussions in youth sports earlier this year, Dr. Andrew Gregory, a member of USA Football's Medical Advisory Committee, highlighted these same figures from the Datalys study. Dr. Gregory stated on the record, "According to a 2014 youth football study encompassing more than 2,000 players, leagues that participated in the Heads Up Football program showed a 76 percent reduction in all injuries during practice, 38 percent reduction in all injuries during games, 34 percent fewer concussions during practice, and 29 percent decline in concussions during games." Dr. Gregory's prepared testimony noted that this data was part of a peer-reviewed study published in the *Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine* in July 2015. USA Football Executive Director Scott Hallenbeck again highlighted these figures in a letter to the Committee in May 2015.⁴

Yet, a recent *New York Times* review found that the Datalys study published in 2015 in fact cited different injury and concussion statistics than those reported in the preliminary findings. The figures in the 2015 published study found that adoption of the Heads Up Football program alone did not result in a meaningful drop in concussions or in overall injuries.⁵ The study found that leagues that used only the Heads Up Football program (and no accompanying changes in practice rules) actually saw slightly higher concussion rates.

We are writing to understand how this misleading and false information was initially compiled, how it came to be so widely disseminated, and how USA Football is ensuring it is corrected. Please provide a response to the following questions by September 13, 2016:

1. The Datalys Center for Sports Injury Research and Prevention has conducted at least three studies assessing the Heads Up Football Program in various capacities.⁶
 - a. How did USA Football select Datalys to conduct the study on the injury and concussion rates of the Heads Up program?
 - b. Has USA Football relied on any other organizations to conduct studies on the effectiveness of its programs?
 - c. Is Datalys in the process of conducting any additional studies of USA Football programs?

⁴ Letter from Scott Hallenbeck, Executive Director, USA Football, to Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member, et al (May 25, 2015).

⁵ *N.F.L.-Backed Youth Program Says It Reduced Concussions. The Data Disagrees.*, New York Times (July 27, 2016).

⁶ Letter from Scott Hallenbeck, Executive Director, USA Football, to Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member, et al (May 25, 2015).

2. The concussion and injury statistics changed between February 2015, when Datalys reported its preliminary findings to USA Football, and July 2015, when the study was published in the *Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine*.⁷
 - a. What changed between February and July 2015 that resulted in dramatically different findings?
 - b. How and when did USA Football receive a copy of the study published in July 2015?
 - c. How and when did Datalys notify USA Football of the difference between the preliminary findings and the final study?
3. What processes and procedures does USA Football undertake to ensure the accuracy of scientific studies they endorse? Does USA Football plan to update any of those processes for the future?
4. USA Football has committed to removing the false figures from its promotional materials and notifying “partners and constituents” of the errors.⁸ Yet, youth football programs and football officials continue to cite the preliminary findings as evidence that Heads Up Football makes the sport safer.
 - a. Who are the “partners and constituents” you have notified or plan to notify of the errors?
 - b. What efforts are being undertaken to contact youth football programs and coaches to ensure they have accurate information on the effectiveness of Heads Up Football in reducing concussions and other injuries?
 - c. What efforts are being undertaken to contact parents and youth football players to ensure they have accurate information on the effectiveness of Heads Up Football in reducing concussions and other injuries?
5. Does USA Football plan to make changes to the Heads Up program or introduce new programs designed to meaningfully reduce concussions and other injuries?

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

⁷ *N.F.L.-Backed Youth Program Says It Reduced Concussions. The Data Disagrees.*, New York Times (July 27, 2016).

⁸ *Id.*

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Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member



Gene Green
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health



Diana DeGette
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and
Investigations



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