

**HEARING BEFORE THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE ENERGY & COMMERCE COMMITTEE:
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, MANUFACTURING, & TRADE**

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Written Testimony of Anthony Egbo

Chairman Bilirakis, Vice Chairman Fulcher, Ranking Member Schakowsky and distinguished subcommittee members; thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I consider it a privilege to share my perspectives on the world of college athletics and my student-athlete experience. That experience has been central to my life for the better part of my maturing adulthood.

My name is Anthony Egbo, Jr; I currently serve at Abilene Christian University as the Director of the Wildcat Club, the fundraising arm for all 15 Athletic Programs. Before stepping into this role, I came to the front doors of ACU's football facility on my own accord as a 145-pound defensive back walk-on hopeful. That hope eventually turned into a full-ride scholarship, a 2-year starter, team captain, the FCS Defensive Scholar of the Year, multiple internships, two degrees, including my MBA, and multiple job offers before I finished my last class. As part of this experience, I had the opportunity to immerse myself in student-athlete advocacy, serving as an Officer, Vice-President for two years, and President of my institution's Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC). I was then nominated to serve as the Division 1 Student-Athlete representative for the Western Athletic Conference, culminating in me being voted by my peers as the Vice Chair of the NCAA Division I National Student-Athlete Advisory Committee.

My story is one of opportunity—the kind of opportunity that defines college athletics for hundreds of thousands of student-athletes like me. I walked onto ACU's football team as an undersized player with a dream. Yes, it took hard work, perseverance, and support from those around me, but opportunity is what gave life to those dreams. It also created leadership experiences that have shaped my future.

My goal is to share my perspective in a way that I hope gives you a personal look into what makes being a Student-Athlete in America one of the greatest opportunities in the world and why many student-athletes feel we need congressional intervention to protect it.

My Experience with Name, Image, and Likeness:

I know this hearing is about NIL, so I thought it appropriate to give context on my relationship and engagement with NIL over my career. I was blessed with the opportunity to integrate myself at my institution and into the surrounding community, which led to multiple avenues for me to benefit from my Name, Image, and likeness. The first deal came from a nutraceutical company, which has grown into a national brand, Chike Nutrition. The good thing for me was that they are headquartered not even 5 minutes from my campus, and my middle name is Chike (a Nigerian root name meaning power); it was a natural fit, and I was able to strike a deal with them as I appeared in social media campaigns for them. The second deal came from a local coffee shop and Bakery in town named The Front Porch. They recognized me as a leader and marketable figure, and before long, the "Egbo Sandwich" was born. A sandwich named after me premiered through my entire senior year and was discounted based on my performance in each game.

Last but not least, I had my largest deal with First Financial Bank, a national Bank that also happens to be headquartered in Abilene. I became their national brand ambassador, with multiple commercials, photoshoots, and even appearances in their stakeholder meetings. The professional development I gleaned from these deals and the compensation I earned embodies everything NIL is supposed to be about. NIL is a beautiful tool that should be used and leveraged by student-athletes across the country in ways that not only give them a chance to make money but also create professional networks, professional development, and real-world experiences that will be carried into life after sports. The reality is it's the Wild Wild West. With more than 30 state NIL laws and litigation challenging basic rules like eligibility, different states and institutions within those states are operating on different playing fields. Simply put, everyone is not playing by the same rulebook. I've seen and heard these realities up close, specifically in the Division 1 football world. That is why working to make sure NIL rules and regulations are not only uniform across all states and schools but can also be enforced is essential.

The Reality of College Athletics

When people think of college sports, they often imagine the big-time football and basketball games that are played on national TV. But the reality is much broader. Over 190,000 student-athletes compete in Division 1 sports each year, and the vast majority of them—like me—are not household names. They are students who dedicate their time and energy to their sport while simultaneously earning their degree and catapulting themselves into life after athletics. For these student-athletes, the unique opportunity to do all these things at once is unique to college sports. Multitudes of student-athletes share my thoughts -- WE VALUE THIS EXPERIENCE

TREMENDOUSLY, and we know that College sports have evolved. We are actively engaging in more ways to be involved in its evolution, and while there is still work to do, we must be careful not to dismantle what makes it special.

As a Division 1 National SAAC member and Vice-Chair, I have had the opportunity to talk to athletes from different Division 1 Conferences across the country. If I could sum up my conversations in two major points, it would be this:

1. Uniform Access and Rules to NIL and Other Benefits

At the end of the day, I haven't talked to one student-athlete who is anti-getting paid. However, creating sustainable avenues for participation, graduation, and health and well-being is equally at the forefront of our desires. Those avenues include scholarship guarantees, post-eligibility health insurance, revenue-sharing like that proposed in the House settlement, and, of course, our favorite NIL. These are all good changes and enhancements to the progress of systems to benefit student-athletes. These avenues satiate the desire without dismantling the foundation of the student-athlete model. That foundation is what keeps college sports precisely what they are- sports for college kids. Protecting NIL rights and creating protections for student-athletes is imperative. I've heard of student-athletes getting swindled and others getting taken advantage of because there are not clear and enforceable rules. I've seen schools or representatives of schools make promises that were not kept, agents take cuts beyond reasonable cause, and even some student-athletes get convinced to take courses of action that are evasive of their prior commitments. Uniform rules and clarity on them are needed to ensure that NIL is here to stay; it fulfills its intended purposes and is not harmful to the ones it was created to benefit.

2. To remain student-athletes, not employees.

I have surveyed and talked directly to hundreds of student-athletes from a range of demographics, geographical spots, and sports about employment status and their perception of it, far more than most. I've also had significant exposure to university administration and presidents and how universities will be impacted. The consensus I can confidently state is this: Not only does an employment model dismantle the principle and foundational values of the student-athlete experience, but it is also unsustainable. Most importantly, student-athletes as a whole have great concerns with being classified as employees of their institutions. Some have offered different opinions on this subject, and I'd offer this; just ask student-athletes. Ask a chunk of the 190,000 Division 1 players – those that will be living the effects of this decision - what THEY actually want and what THEY actually believe is best for THEM. Ask the Power 4 Football Player, the mid-major Lacrosse player, the Women's Volleyball Player, and the Gymnast. In my conversations, student-athletes overwhelmingly say they do not want to be employees of their schools.

A Better Path Forward: Enhancing What it means to be a College Student-Athlete While Preserving Opportunity

I may be a dreamer, but I do believe there is a path forward that can satiate every concern all parties have. It doesn't need to be black and white; in reality, it shouldn't be. Here are my claims that I believe wholeheartedly: Student-athletes should have the ability to be compensated and also profit off their Name, Image, and Likeness. Revenue sharing is critical. NIL is critical, and not only should they be in place, but they should continue to be enhanced as college sports continue to elevate. Student-athletes should be protected with scholarship guarantees, health insurance guarantees, post-eligibility financial funding, and other vital and enhanced protections even beyond what is in place now. Institutions should ensure that an educational component of the experience is foundational because the ultimate goal is to educate the future leaders of our country. There should be enhanced systems in place not only for student-athlete voice at the table but also for actual decision-making power and influence on matters that pertain to their experience at every level and my peers and I are working on ideas to improve what's already in place. The unintended consequences of employment seemingly do irreparable damage to the experience we know as college student-athletes. This is why I am here to testify. It's not because I was an All-American, big-time SEC Football player. It's because I'm the opposite. I dreamed of playing Division 1 Football, so I walked on, and my life was never the same. I got an education that has changed the trajectory of my life, internships, and professional development

opportunities that have led to my first full-time job out of school, all while playing the game I have always dreamed of playing at that level. Oh, and by the way, I snuck in 2 SEC starts along the way.

Playing my last collegiate game, starting against Texas A&M, was the culmination of that dream. So, I am here for guys like me. For women who compete at schools like mine, those who play in non-revenue generating sports, those who compete at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, those who play Olympic sports, and those who are places that are offering athletics at a deficit to the university, This is the majority. This is really what most Division 1 sports programs are made up of.

So I'm here for 17-year-olds in high school who have dreams and just want an opportunity. Kids that wouldn't be where they are without a chance, without an opportunity. There's nothing that embodies what American College Sports is supposed to be than that.

I'm asking you to help student-athletes by creating uniformity and stability with NIL, protecting us from employment status classification, and ensuring consistent rules can be made and enforced.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. One of the beautiful things about our country is the fervent commitment we have to prepare the generations coming after us. I am incredibly appreciative of your commitment to shaping policies that will positively impact the next generation of student-athletes.

I look forward to the future with optimism.