

Written Testimony
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Chairman Allen, Ranking Member DeSaulnier, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on this important topic.

Transferring to Oklahoma State University was one of the most pivotal decisions of my life. I was looking to revitalize my playing experience with new coaches, new teammates, and a new chance at the sport I loved. I sought an environment where I could thrive not just as an athlete, but as a student and a person. Oklahoma State provided exactly that—a home and a community that I full-heartedly decided to plant my roots in because of its small-town feel, close-knit culture, and unwavering support system.

At Oklahoma State, I was encouraged to pursue excellence on and off the softball field. Our coaching staff prioritized our academics above all else, ensuring that our education remained the foundation of our student-athlete experience. Unlike some programs where academic choices are restricted to fit athletic schedules, our coaches empowered us to pursue any major and career path we desired. They understood the importance of preparing us for life beyond the game and went to great lengths to accommodate our academic ambitions. Our practice schedules were carefully crafted to align with each athlete's class commitments, demonstrating their genuine investment in our future.

One of the most defining aspects of my experience with Cowgirl Softball was the unique culture of trust, respect, and open communication. Our team operated under an open-door policy, fostering an environment where we felt comfortable discussing not only softball-related matters but also personal challenges with our coaching staff. Our coaches were more than just mentors on the field—they were confidants, role models, and consistent supporters of our personal growth. The sense of family and camaraderie that we cultivated is something that is difficult to conceptualize in a future where student-athletes are treated as employees rather than valued members of a team and academic institution.

My time as a student-athlete at Oklahoma State was about more than just the wins, losses, or accolades. It was about the relationships I built, the lessons I learned, and the constant support system that shaped me into the person I am today. I fear that shifting student-athletes into an employment model would erode the very essence of what makes collegiate athletics so transformative. My experience at Oklahoma State was rooted in a culture of academic support, athletic excellence, and personal development—values that should be protected and preserved for generations of student-athletes to come.

My service on the Division I National Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (DI SAAC) has given me a unique and deeply personal perspective on the discussions surrounding student-athlete employment. DI SAAC is composed of one representative of each of the 32 conferences, who are primarily mid-major student-athletes that compete in non-revenue generating sports. These are individuals who have worked tirelessly for years to reach the highest level of collegiate competition, driven by passion, dedication, and the pursuit of excellence. These are the

voices that would undoubtedly be overshadowed, silenced, and replaced by the voices of revenue-generating student-athletes prioritized in an employment-based model. As the conversation around student-athlete employment has intensified, so has the overwhelming anxiety that the opportunities many of us have worked so hard for may not be available to those who come after us.

As former co-chair of the Division 1 Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, I conducted in-person and virtual tours from individual campuses to full conferences, speaking to hundreds of athletes across the division. It is through this experience that I have witnessed firsthand the real fear in the voices and minds of student-athletes who are grappling with the uncertainty of what employment status could mean for their futures and the future of college athletics as a whole. SAAC is an integral body of the NCAA governance structure that cannot afford to be lost in the conversation of student-athlete employment.

The reality is that many institutions, especially mid-major programs, do not have the financial resources to support student-athletes under an employment model. The fear is not just about what employment might mean for us individually—it is about what it means for the sustainability of our sports, our teammates, and the thousands of student-athletes who dream of competing at this level in the future. The potential for institutions to cut sports to afford employment costs is gut-wrenching and difficult to comprehend. For so many of us, college athletics is about more than just competition—it is about education, personal growth, and being part of something bigger than ourselves. To watch that be stripped away due to financial constraints is devastating.

I have sat in rooms where student-athletes have openly expressed their fear of losing the very opportunities that have shaped them. I have listened as they worry about the unintended consequences of a system that may benefit only a small percentage while leaving the rest behind. I have seen the weight of these concerns take a toll on athletes who should be focusing on their sport, their academics, and their futures rather than worrying about whether their sport will even exist as a sponsored sport in a few years.

The idea of employment may seem like progress to some, but for the vast majority of student-athletes who are not in revenue-generating sports, it represents a significant and deeply personal threat to the foundation of collegiate athletics. The collegiate model as it stands provides opportunities for thousands of athletes to pursue both their education and their sport. This is not to say the collegiate model as it stands should not undergo massive changes to enhance student-athlete support, but it is important to underscore that opportunities would likely be diminished or eliminated under an employment structure.

As a representative of student-athletes across Division I and the current student-athlete voting member of the NCAA Board of Governors, I urge decision-makers to truly listen to the voices of those who will be impacted the most rather than the few that would benefit the most. The future

of college athletics should not be dictated by financial gain alone, but by the preservation of the life-changing opportunities that it provides to so many.

Student-Athlete Employment Considerations

The recent discourse surrounding collegiate student-athlete employment has raised significant concerns regarding the ramifications such a shift would have on the structure and sustainability of college athletics. While advocates argue that student-athletes should be treated as employees, the potential consequences of such a move could be detrimental to the broader collegiate sports ecosystem, including disparities in rights and benefits, economic feasibility, and institutional viability. My overall testimony seeks to highlight the adverse effects of classifying student-athletes as employees and to demonstrate why such a move would create more problems than a simple solution. The considerations below are the various points that have been the most distressing to myself and the hundreds of student-athletes I have personally spoken to:

Current Model for Student-Athletes

Currently, the NCAA provides student-athletes with a very unique benefits model. During my time on D1 SAAC, we worked closely with the Transformation Committee to create stronger protections for student-athletes. Effective on August 1, 2024, the [NCAA Core Guarantees](#) were implemented to enhance student-athlete benefits and services, expand scholarship protections and enhance expectations of Division I schools. Scholarship protections became more concrete, the degree completion program was expanded to all student-athletes of head count sports, and the coverage of healthcare and medical services was significantly extended.

Student-athletes of the autonomy group – comprising five participating conferences, the Atlantic Coast, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12 and Southeastern – were already familiar with aid agreements outlining protections from aid cancellations due to athletic reasons. However, these core guarantees expanded that to include all institutions in Division I. Any new athletics aid agreements must meet new requirements that schools cannot reduce, cancel or fail to renew athletics aid for athletics reasons, such as injury, physical or mental illness, athletic ability or performance, contribution to team success, or roster management decisions.

Additionally, Division I schools are now required to cover medical costs for an athletically related injury for at least two years after either graduation or separation from the school, or until the student-athlete qualifies for coverage under the [NCAA Catastrophic Injury Insurance Program](#). The [Post-Eligibility Insurance Program](#) was also activated for all student-athletes. They also include out-of-pocket medical expenses, such as coinsurance, copayments, deductibles and other medical expenses not reimbursed by insurance.

Reclassifying student-athletes as employees would create an inconsistent application of employee rights and benefits, potentially replacing the robust, comprehensive support we currently receive with a fragmented model offering fewer protections and resources.

Unionization and Collective Bargaining

One of the primary concerns with student-athlete employment is the potential for unionization and collective bargaining. If athletes were considered employees, they may be able to form unions, leading to negotiations that would significantly impact university budgets and operations. This could create disparities between revenue-generating and non-revenue-generating sports and public and private institutions, potentially leading to the reduction or elimination of certain programs. This begs the overarching question: what athletes will have the representing seats at the table with decision-making power? Power 4 student-athletes of revenue-generating sports should not be the sole decision-making voices for the entirety of student-athletes. However, increasing seats at the table to include a comprehensive representation of student-athletes should be taken into consideration first before completely replacing the current system.

Compensation, Benefits, Tax Implications, and State Entertainment Taxes

The financial ramifications of student-athlete employment are vast. If classified as employees, student athletic scholarships could instead be classified as a working wage subject to federal and state income taxes, potentially reducing student-athlete take-home benefits. Moreover, some states impose entertainment taxes on income derived from sports performances, which could further complicate the financial situation of student-athletes. Schools would also be responsible for payroll taxes, further straining athletic department budgets.

Another critical factor to consider is whether student-athletes would be paid an hourly wage or receive a salary. If hourly wages were implemented, determining fair pay rates across sports and schools would be incredibly complex. Would athletes be compensated based on hours spent in practice, competition playing time, or team-related activities? Would different sports receive different wage rates based on revenue generation? These are fundamental questions that have yet to be resolved.

Some suggestions have leaned toward classifying student-athletes as student workers, similar to work-study positions on campus. However, this raises additional concerns regarding minimum wage laws, overtime pay, and the ability of schools to afford widespread compensation. Similar to student working jobs, athletic commitments have a maximum limit of 20 [CARA](#) hours per week for in-season student-athletes. However, the reality is that Division 1 student-athletes volunteer additional hours (sometimes more than 40 hours) or more of their personal time to perfect their athletic skills on top of the 20 CARA hours. The natural concern for student-athletes is the thought of what may happen if overtime labor laws impact our ability to work on our craft.

Would we no longer be able to devote our free time to work on extra repetitions? Would we even be allowed access “after hours” into our facilities past our regulated working hours?

The taxation of student-athlete compensation could lead to unintended consequences, including a reduction in scholarships or other benefits to offset these costs. If student-athletes are considered employees, their tuition benefits may be impacted. Many schools currently provide scholarships that cover tuition, but under an employment model, these scholarships may be converted into wages, subject to taxation, which would then have to be used to pay for school, diminishing their value. There are also many student-athletes who receive federal financial aid. How would the possibility of increased income affect a student-athlete’s eligibility for federal financial aid? Would universities or the federal government reconsider tuition assistance for student-athletes, increasing out-of-pocket costs for players?

This idea could disproportionately impact non-revenue sports. Institutions may struggle to balance the financial burden of employment taxes while maintaining broad-based athletic programs and student-athletes may struggle to pay for school out-of-pocket. Additionally, student-athletes unfamiliar with complex tax regulations could find themselves at risk of financial mismanagement or unexpected tax liabilities. With state laws varying widely regarding taxation on athletic earnings, student-athletes in certain states may face higher tax burdens than others, creating inequities in compensation. Furthermore, institutions in states with high entertainment taxes may face additional hurdles in maintaining competitive athletic programs while adhering to tax laws.

In the long run, the shift toward an employment model could force athletic departments to reassess their budget priorities, potentially leading to program cuts, increased reliance on donor contributions in a time of major donor fatigue, or reductions in support services for student-athletes. Athletic departments operate under strict budgets, many of which already struggle to break even. According to a [2022 NCAA report](#), 65 FBS autonomy schools accounted for over 50% of total Division I expenses which the other 250 plus schools depend on. It is imperative that these financial implications be thoroughly examined before implementing changes that could fundamentally alter the collegiate athletic landscape, diminishing the overall experience and disproportionately affecting Olympic and women’s sports.

Future of Women’s Sports

As a female student-athlete, I would be remiss if I did not point out employment status as a major threat to the future of women’s sports, which is still relatively new in comparison to the existence of collegiate athletics. For 53 years, Title IX legislation has ensured gender equity in collegiate athletics. Women’s sports, which often rely on institutional support rather than revenue generation, could suffer greatly under an employment model. The employment model could severely weaken Title IX compliance, leading to potential lawsuits and regulatory issues. If schools prioritize funding for revenue-generating men’s sports, women’s programs could see

decreased investment, leading to fewer scholarships, reduced facilities, and a decline in overall participation.

Impact on Division II, Division III, and Junior Colleges

Student-athlete employment would not just affect the Division I, revenue-generating athletes. The ramifications of student-athlete employment would extend beyond Division I. It is important to remember that out of the 520,000 student-athletes that compete in the NCAA, only 190,000 compete within Division I, only approximately 12,000 play football, and only approximately 11,000 play men's and women's basketball. This means that DI non-revenue generating athletes and Division II and III institutions make up the other nearly 350,000. Division II, Division III, and even junior college programs should also be considered in these conversations as the impact of student-athlete employment would be devastating. These schools operate with significantly smaller budgets, and would also be unable to provide employment benefits comparable to those at Power Four schools. This could lead to the dissolution of many programs, depriving hundreds of thousands of student-athletes opportunities to compete and receive an education through athletics.

Future of Walk-Ons and High School Recruiting

The employment model would likely eliminate the concept of walk-on athletes, as employment laws would necessitate contractual agreements with compensation structures. Additionally, the recruitment of high school athletes would become more transactional, with universities competing to offer the highest salaries rather than prioritizing education and development. This could create a scenario where mid-major and lower-division programs struggle to attract talent, further widening the competitive gap between major conference schools and the rest of collegiate athletics. Additionally, I started college at the age of 17. A change of this magnitude does not even account for or consider the implications on student-athletes who graduate high school as legal minors.

Eligibility and Length of Competition

Current NCAA eligibility rules align with the standard amount of years it would take to complete an undergraduate degree – 4 years with the opportunity of a fifth year – providing a limited window of competition. Employment status may necessitate new contractual regulations that could alter traditional eligibility timelines, potentially leading to disputes over contracts and term limits. The employment model could shift the emphasis from academics to athletics. A significant question arises regarding eligibility—how many years would a student-athlete be permitted to compete as an employee? Additionally, student-athletes are required to maintain academic eligibility to compete, but employment status could undermine academic commitments, as athletic departments may prioritize athletic performance over academic success.

Transfer Portal and Transfer Regulations

Employment status could significantly impact the transfer portal. While the NCAA currently governs transfer rules, classifying student-athletes as employees could introduce many legal complexities that could potentially limit student-athletes' movement between institutions. Unlike coaches who are bound by contractual obligations, student-athletes value the freedom of movement the recent changes to the transfer portal provides. We do not want a future that could limit our ability to make decisions that are best for our academic and athletic careers or further complicate an already challenging and emotional process.

Impact on the Olympics

Collegiate Athletics plays a significant role in the development of athletes on a global scale and our Olympic sport student-athletes play a vital role in the diversity and competitiveness of collegiate sports. The NCAA's footprint in the Olympics and Paralympics comprised more than 1,300 athletes representing 125 countries at the [2024 Paris Games](#).

It is beyond clear that the NCAA serves as a vital pipeline for Olympic development, fostering the growth of athletes who go on to represent the United States and other countries on the global stage. However, if institutions are forced to cut non-revenue sports due to the financial strain of an employment model, Olympic sports such as track and field, wrestling, swimming, and gymnastics could suffer tremendously. With fewer collegiate programs, the Olympic teams' depth and competitiveness would be directly impacted, diminishing the nation's presence and success in future games.

The threatening loss of athletic opportunity with the elimination of Olympic and non-revenue sports would fundamentally alter the collegiate landscape, stripping away opportunities for thousands of student-athletes and diminishing the global impact of American college athletics.

Conclusion

It is imperative for me as an active listener and advocate in this space to acknowledge the key arguments supporters of student-athlete employment often make. They argue that collegiate athletes, particularly those in revenue-generating sports, contribute significantly to the financial success of their universities and should be fairly compensated for their labor. Student-athletes, particularly those in revenue-generating sports like football and basketball, bring in millions of dollars for their universities through ticket sales, media rights, sponsorships, and merchandise. Yet, they do not receive direct compensation for their labor in an exploitative system that limits them to NIL deals. Employment status would allow them to receive fair wages for their contributions, aligning their treatment with other workers in the collegiate ecosystem. Student-athletes could gain access to essential employee protections and benefits.

Employment status is their blanket solution to help correct this imbalance. While the idea of student-athlete employment may seem like a step toward fairness and the most “quick-fix” solution, it is inherently clear that the broader implications reveal a host of challenges that could ultimately weaken collegiate athletics and show this “solution” to be all but a “quick-fix.”

My hope is that I have conveyed enough concern and deep consideration for each point to show that the numerous consequences of classifying student-athletes as employees would create inconsistencies and inequity, significantly reduce athletic opportunities, and disrupt the collegiate sports model. It is important that we celebrate the long-standing success that football and men’s and women’s basketball bring to the NCAA and also realize that more must be done for these athletes. But it is also imperative to recognize and protect the vast majority of student-athletes that make up the other 88 championship sports in the NCAA. A more balanced approach—one that enhances benefits and opportunities, while maintaining the student-athlete model—is necessary to protect the future of college sports for generations to come.