Opening Statement of Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici (OR-01)
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Hearing
"Field of Fees: Private Equity's Role in the Commercialization of American Youth Sports"
Tuesday, June 30, 2026 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here with your expertise and also your experience on this important issue. Also, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your statement this morning.

I expect we can all agree that families across the country are feeling squeezed. The cost of groceries, housing, child care, health care, and more are outpacing wages, and too many parents are being asked to do more with less. Children are experiencing pressures too— in many ways, including what we are discussing today. Helping families gain access to rewarding and enriching extracurricular and intramural activities is not a partisan issue— and it should be a shared priority.

And that is why today's hearing is so important and timely.

Youth sports are about more than wins and losses. They improve children's physical and mental health, teach teamwork and leadership, foster social skills, build confidence, resilience, and self-esteem, and are linked to stronger academic outcomes. Youth sports bring communities together and can give kids from all backgrounds the opportunity to learn, grow, and belong.

More than 60 million children participate in youth sports in the United States annually. But today, that opportunity has become a luxury for too many.

The average family now spends more than $1,500 a year for one child to participate in sports, and those costs have risen dramatically in just the past five years. Registration fees, travel, equipment, lodging, exclusive streaming services, tournaments, and camps they've all turned what was once a community activity into an expensive industry that far too many families simply cannot afford.

A major reason for that shift— in addition to the underfunding of schools, parks, and recreation programs— is the growing role of private equity and market consolidation in the youth sports landscape. This Subcommittee's last hearing on youth sports, where Ms. Van Dyke testified on the harmful effects of private equity in the youth sports sector, began this conversation, and we are pleased to welcome her back today to discuss more important research in this area.

Private equity firms are buying up youth leagues, training facilities, sports venues, camps, and tournaments, consolidating control over the market and driving up costs for families. When fewer companies control more of an industry, competition declines, prices rise, and families are left with fewer affordable choices. And too often the priority is not the well-being of children— it is profit.

This isn't just happening in youth sports. We've seen similar patterns across the economy, including in health care, child care, and housing, where consolidation leaves consumers paying more but getting less. And the Trump Administration is not taking any action to rein in private equity, curb corporate greed, or protect consumers. In fact, the private equity industry owns more businesses than all those listed on the U.S. stock exchanges combined. Youth sports are simply the latest example of how unchecked market power can make everyday opportunities less accessible for families.

In addition to private equity firms wreaking havoc on the youth sports industry, the Trump Administration is hurting rather than helping with youth access. Their Fiscal Year 2027 budget proposes cutting $2.3 billion from the Department of Education and more than $1.1 billion [from] national parks and recreation areas. These reductions directly contribute to the lack of accessible sports and outdoor programs for children.

Fortunately, there are solutions.

Our Democratic witness, Ms. Van Dyck, will discuss reforms Congress and the Administration should consider, including greater transparency around fees and business practices, robust antitrust enforcement, and increased public investment in community recreation and school-based sports programs so every child has access to affordable opportunities close to home.

Now, speaking of close to home, in the district I represent, we have a very active and well-funded parks and recreation district, the Walton Parks and Recs. District. They partner with our local schools. It's a great partnership to expand access to parks and fields

I also want to make clear there is a role for the private sector when the focus is on the well-being of youth. For example, the Nike World Headquarters, which is down the street from my office, [has] programs like the Nike Community Impact Fund that provides grants to local nonprofits and schools, and programs that offer coaching skills.

Finally, this hearing is about more than sports. It is about protecting families from being priced out of the opportunities that help them thrive and not forcing parents to choose between paying the bills and allowing their child to participate in activities that keep them healthy and [lead] to success.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses about how we can protect families, restore competition, and make youth sports accessible to every child in every community in every Congressional district.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.