

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frederica Wilson (FL-24)**

Joint Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions and Higher Education Workforce  
Development Hearing

*"Safeguarding Student-Athletes from NLRB Misclassification"*

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Tuesday, March 12, 2024 | 10:15 a.m.

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Thank you, Mr. Owens, and thank you to the witnesses for your testimonies today.

As Members of this Committee, our number one priority should be always the students' well-being.

Students' well-being was top of mind three years ago when Congressional Democrats single-handedly passed the *American Rescue Plan Act* and delivered emergency financial aid to 18 million college students during the height of the pandemic.

During that turbulent period, we focused on ensuring that students were set up for success, and I hope that today's hearing does not deviate from that approach.

Since its inception, the NCAA has prohibited collegiate athletes from being compensated for their labor. According to the NCAA, athletes can take scholarships up to the full cost of attendance in their current educational programs, but they may not get funds for graduate programs, meal stipends, living accommodations, or variable educational expenditures.

This puts college athletes who are entirely dependent on financial aid in an impossible position.

Furthermore, the most essential voice in the room should be that of the college athletes, because without them there would be no collegiate sports industry. So hear them, see them, and do what is best for them.

As our witness, Mr. Gaston Pearce, notes in his testimony, the route forward after unionization is undetermined, but we do know that athletes deserve a seat at the table.

Allowing students to organize unions is an important step toward making college athletics a safer and more equal place for athletes to thrive.

With that, Mr. Chair, I yield back, and I look forward to a productive discussion. Thank you.