

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing On “The Impact of Concussions on High School Athletes”

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a committee hearing on “The Impact of Concussions on High School Athletes”*

Good morning.

Today we’ll examine how concussions, experienced by high school athletes on the playing field, are impacting their academic well being and quality of life.

We’ll also learn more about how schools and the medical community can provide appropriate management and support for these young student athletes.

One of our committee’s key priorities has been looking at how we can keep students safe and protected in school.

But this is our first hearing looking at what happens on the athletic field, where many school injuries occur.

Last year, Congressman Andrews, Congresswoman Bono-Mack and I asked the Government Accountability Office to look into concussions in high school athletics after several professional athletes suffered debilitating and news-making head injuries diagnosed as concussions.

It was clear to us that if the NFL was paying attention to concussions at the professional level, we should be doing the same at the high school level – when students’ bodies and minds are still growing and therefore more vulnerable.

Today, GAO will share the findings of their report.

We’ll hear about the incidents of concussions in high school sports and what federal programs exist to help prevent these catastrophic injuries from sidelining students. This is the first comprehensive look at what is being done to prevent and manage these injuries.

When a student suffers a concussion, serious repercussions can occur both on the field and in the classroom.

On the playing field, concussions can pose significant health risks to students.

High school athletes are at greater risk of sports-related concussions than college or professional athletes because their younger brains are more susceptible to injury.

In the last three school years, 400,000 concussions were reported in high school athletics.

And this could be a low estimate.

Studies show that the prevalence of sport-related concussions is much higher than reported.

A concussion, unlike a sprain or a broken bone, is not always easily detected.

Ninety percent of concussions occur without loss of consciousness.

Concussions can cause a range of symptoms, from altered mental status to physical symptoms such as headaches or dizziness to emotional changes like irritability and difficulty sleeping.

The number and type of symptoms vary widely for each person.

But unless a student takes time off the field after suffering a concussion, he or she may be prolonging their recovery and their success in school may suffer.

Unfortunately, we also know that the symptoms of concussions are not only difficult to detect, but are not always taken seriously.

In the sports injury community, there is a saying: “When in doubt, sit it out.”

But a recent study shows that more than half of high school girls’ volleyball and boys basketball and baseball players who suffered concussions return to play too soon.

This is a problem that isn’t limited to student athletes. College and professional athletes also feel the pressure to compete and stay in the game.

What we see here is pressure to play is overriding medical concerns and – potentially – a student’s academic future.

As we will learn more about today, failing to “sit it out” after a concussion can negatively affect students in the classroom.

One of our witnesses will tell us that almost 90 percent of girls recovering from a concussion reported that their symptoms worsened after trying to focus on schoolwork.

Any parent can tell you that participating in sports doesn’t just get their kids moving – it gives them skills that will come in handy in school, on the job and throughout their lives.

Our goal today is to make sure that our kids can continue to participate in sports safely – and continue to reap the benefits both on and off the playing field.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about what schools can be doing better to help support high school athletes, and testimony on the effects of concussions on student achievement.

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