



PRESS RELEASE

CALL FOR CONGRESS TO ACT ON COLLEGE ATHLETES BILL OF RIGHTS FOLLOWING REPORTS OF HAZING AND ABUSE AT NORTHWESTERN

WESTPORT, CT – JULY 18, 2023. Prompted by last week’s reports about systemic sexual hazing, harassment, racism and other abuse in Northwestern University athletics programs, The Drake Group renews its call for Congressional action on the College Athletes Bill of Rights, sponsored by U.S. Senators Cory Booker (NJ) and Richard Blumenthal (CT) (see [S.4724 – 117th Congress](#)). The legislation would provide college athletes the same protections Congress afforded non-school Olympic athletes under the [Safe Sport Act](#) in 2020.

Passage of the bill would establish a permanent federally chartered nongovernmental Commission on College Athletics with the authority to subject any individual found to have caused serious harm to a college athlete to a lifetime ban on involvement in intercollegiate athletics. The Commission would also be charged with installing strong athlete health, wellness, and safety standards, detailing athletes’ rights related to educational outcomes, and requiring penalties be issued to institutions violating the provisions of the Act in any manner determined by the Commission.

“Last week’s firing of Northwestern University’s head football coach for sexual hazing and racist abuse is simply the latest example among many of why Congress must act to protect college athletes,” said Donna Lopiano, President of The Drake Group Board of Directors. “Scandals like this one, and the subsequent firing of Northwestern’s baseball coach for abusive acts, are the tip of the iceberg for thousands of athletes whose stories are never told, rarely believed, and who fear retribution if they do come forward. We need uniform federal protections for young athletes so they know they can report abuse, and their abusers will be held accountable.”

Past research by The Drake Group Education Fund underscores the depth of the crisis illustrated by the Northwestern revelations. Their policy paper, [College Athlete Health and Protection from Physical and Psychological Harm](#) cites many more similar institutional failures to address athlete harm.

“Because intercollegiate athletics are primarily run as a business, when significant harm to athletes occurs, institutions often go to extraordinary lengths to shield details from public view,” said Lopiano. “They fear that information transparency will result in lawsuits and bad press that will, in turn, adversely affect athletic recruiting, general institutional admissions, alumni/donor contributions, and

ticket sales.”

Indeed, the pattern of trying to shield the program from full transparency – and negative press – was at play in the Northwestern case. On July 7th, Northwestern University announced the suspension of its head football coach for two weeks, disclosing an “[executive summary](#)” of the hired law firm’s investigation. Were it not for the subsequent [investigative reporting of reporters from the Northwestern University’s student newspaper](#), *The Daily Northwestern*, it is likely that neither the details of the alleged nor the subsequent termination of the long beloved head football coach would have been publicly disclosed. The Drake Group’s request for Congressional action is based on the belief that the NCAA remains captured by its member institutions, and lacks the independence – and regulatory authority – to address systemic issues of abuse and the need for thorough, independent investigations.

“The NCAA and its member institutions have demonstrated that they place a higher value on revenue generation and winning athletic events than on educating college athletes or protecting them from abusive practices,” said Lopiano.

“The NCAA does not have any rules that address athletic department coach or staff misconduct that causes harm to an athlete. There are no coaches’ ‘code of conduct’ or complaint processes for athletes to report to a third-party governance entity. The only avenues of relief are that college athletes may complain to their institution, reveal what occurred to the media that in turn publicly embarrasses the institution, make a report to the police, or file a lawsuit. Expecting athletes to “bite the hand that feeds them” is unrealistic, and thus the public sees very little to none of the systemic, abusive, and harmful cultures that exist in some programs.”

Drake Group leaders believe that a Federal College Athletes Bill of Rights will help alleviate athletes’ fears of retaliation – from loss of scholarship renewals, playing time, starting positions, and a chance to advance to professional sports typically cited as reasons to not step forward and report abuse. Furthermore, in the age of Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) rights won by students over the protests of the NCAA and many institutions, additional contracts and compensation could be harmed.

“If enacted, a new Commission on College Athletics proposed in the College Athletes Bill of Rights will offer athletes the hope of an independent, unbiased, and expert investigation by a respected entity not selected by the institution under investigation,” said Lopiano. “Further, the Bill provides that coaches and other “bad actors” that cause such harm may be banned from intercollegiate athletics employment, a result that the NCAA claims currently it does not have jurisdiction to implement.

We believe that the NCAA and its member institutions will not act effectively and are hopeful that Congress will take this opportunity to make needed, overdue changes to protect college athletes.”

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Links to **THE DRAKE GROUP EDUCATION FUND** for more information on these issues:

[Need for Rules Related to Abusive Coaching Conduct](#)

[Continuing Disgrace: Intercollegiate Athletics Race Issues](#)

[Athlete Sexually Harassing Misconduct and Physical Violence](#)

The Drake Group is a 501(c)(4) non-profit organization working to better educate the U.S. Congress and higher education policy-makers about critical issues in intercollegiate athletics. The Drake Group Education Fund (TDGEF) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit education organization whose mission is to ensure that the promise of college athletics is realized for all stakeholders.

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