May 1, 2026

Dear Representatives and Senators,

The undersigned organizations write to urge Congress to act now to ensure that athletes have access to safe, high-quality medical care. Rising legal and financial risks are driving some of our brightest clinicians away from serving in roles for sports teams. When medical professionals step back, athletes lose access to specialized care, and the ripple effects extend from high school gyms to professional stadiums. Supporting the full sports medicine team—physicians, trainers, therapists, and specialists—is essential to keeping athletes healthy, preventing injuries, and preserving opportunities for success both on the field and in the classroom.

Athletes at every level—from youth leagues to the Olympics—thrive when care is at the core. Central to success is not just skill or training, but the team of medical professionals who prevent injuries, guide recovery, and ensure athletes can compete safely. Simply put: every win on the field begins with care off the field.

When athletes cannot safely practice or compete, their development stalls, injuries worsen, and in some cases, students fall behind academically. Missed practices can lead to missed classes, lower grades, or even dropping out of school. Studies show that among students with athletic injuries, up to 65.8% report negative impacts, including missed classes (86%), delayed assignments (96%), and lower exam scores.[1] Further, following musculoskeletal injury, psychosocial and mental health can worsen.[2][3] In other words, the erosion of sports medicine care threatens not just performance, but emotional well-being, educational opportunity, and future potential.

Across the United States, more than 8 million high school athletes and over 500,000 NCAA athletes[4] rely on these teams of clinicians each year. Yet the changing landscape of collegiate athletics has dramatically increased the financial and legal risks for medical personnel. Lawsuits increasingly seek payouts tied to potential lost earnings, driving malpractice insurance

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[1] Shata AR, Shata AR, Bogari DF, Alhazzazi TY. The Impact of Sports Injuries on the Academic Performance and Mental Health of High School Students in Jeddah. Cureus. 2024. Nov;16(11):e73912.
[2] Haraldsdottir, Kristin PhD; Watson, Andrew M. MD, MS. Psychosocial Impacts of Sports-related Injuries in Adolescent Athletes. Curr Sports Med Reports. 2021. Feb; 20(2):104-108.
[3] Park AL, Furie K, Wong SE. Stronger Athlete Identity Is a Risk Factor for More Severe Depressive Symptoms After Musculoskeletal Injury in Pediatric Athletes: a Systematic Review. Curr Rev Musculoskelet Med. 2023. May;16(5):220-228.
[4] https://nfhs.org/stories/participation-in-high-school-sports-hits-record-high-with-sizable-increase-in-2024-25

premiums to unsustainable levels. Experienced sports medicine physicians and specialists are stepping away, leaving gaps in coverage that affect athletes of all ages and abilities.

Three practical steps would stabilize the medical teams that athletes depend on without shielding negligence:

1. **Protect clinicians providing good-faith care**. State models, such as Utah's HB 503, limit catastrophic personal financial exposure for team medical professionals while maintaining accountability for malpractice.

2. **Guarantee medical independence**. Medical personnel—not coaches, agents, boosters, or administrators—must retain final authority over treatment decisions and return-to-play determinations.

3. **Enable continuity of care across state lines**. Allowing team physicians to practice across borders, including via telehealth, ensures that athletes receive consistent treatment when traveling or competing out of state.

The national conversation around college sports often highlights athletes, money, and media rights. However, the health professionals who quietly protect millions of athletes each year cannot be overlooked. Every athlete deserves a safe path to compete—and every win, on or off the field, depends on the care provided by these dedicated teams. Therefore, we urge Congress to enact the policies outlined above to ensure that athletes have access to the care they deserve and that their sports medicine team is equipped to practice with full authority and reasonable protection from the risks associated with restrictive liability laws.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue, and we look forward to working with you to advance bipartisan solutions to these challenges. Please contact Lori Shoaf at shoaf@aaos.org if you have any questions or would like to discuss further.

Sincerely,

Mack Brown, *National Championship Coach, College Football Hall of Fame*
Mike Krzyzewski, *5-Time NCAA National Champion, Olympic Gold Medal Coach, Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame*
Urban Meyer, *3-Time NCAA National Champion, Fox Sports Analyst, College Football Hall of Fame*
Nick Saban, *7-Time NCAA National Champion, ESPN Analyst, College Football Hall of Fame*
Dawn Staley, *3-Time NCAA National Champion, Olympic Gold Medalist, Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame*
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgery
American Medical Society for Sports Medicine
American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine
Professional Sports Physicians Coalition