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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,  
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEB SITE: <http://commerce.senate.gov>

May 1, 2012

Dr. Ralph Cicerone  
Chair, National Research Council  
President, The National Academy of Sciences  
500 5th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Dr. Cicerone:

We are writing in support of recent efforts by the National Academy of Sciences to study sports-related concussions in youth sports. The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation highlighted this issue in a Congressional hearing in October 2011; and we have convened several meetings on this subject matter. Throughout, we have heard from parents, players, doctors, and coaches about the dangers of concussions in sports and the confusion over what sports equipment can and cannot do to prevent these injuries.

Our meetings and the October 2011 hearing have shed light on the need for further examination of the science behind sports-related concussive injuries. The presence of concussions may not be known until hours after the initial trauma, which may lead to student athletes returning to the field too early. Additionally, emerging research suggests that the neurological damage that comes from repetitive, but somewhat milder impacts, may have long-term consequences on student-athletes' cognitive functions.

Given that clinical and scientific studies have already shown the widespread nature of these potential harms—more than 70,000 high school football players and 10,000 high school girl soccer players sustain concussions each year—we believe a consensus study by the Institute of Medicine and the National Academy of Engineering will provide greater clarity on how to protect young athletes. A comprehensive study on this matter should include, at a minimum: findings and recommendations on how to determine the concussive status of a player; guidelines on return to play; and the current and prospective effectiveness of protective devices and equipment in youth sports. While sports will never be risk-free, they can be made safer; and parents, athletes, coaches, and other sports officials should make decisions based on the best science available.

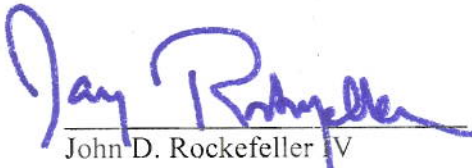
The National Academies are the nation's pre-eminent source of high-quality, objective advice on science, engineering and health matters. Like no other organization, the National Academies can enlist the nation's foremost experts to address the scientific and technical aspects

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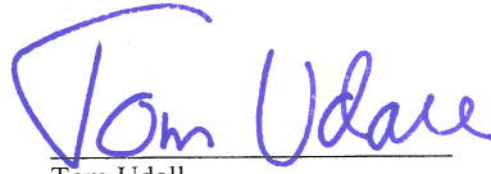
of society's most pressing problems. Through careful study, we have every confidence that your work on this issue will help all stakeholders better understand and prevent the damage caused by youth sports concussions. We also hope that federal agencies and private sector stakeholders become involved in this effort and will use its findings. Not only will an authoritative report better inform the public of this burgeoning public health concern, but it also will provide scientific clarity on an issue, the confusion over which is casting doubt on the safety of certain amateur and professional sports.

We look forward to reviewing your future work and hope to be of assistance in highlighting your findings to the public.

Sincerely,



John D. Rockefeller IV  
United States Senator



Tom Udall  
United States Senator