U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION
Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Ranking Member

The Protect College Sports Act
Section-by-Section Summary

Title I – Protections of Student Athletes and Fair Competition

Section 1 – Short Title and Table of Contents
This Act may be cited as the "[Protect College Sports Act of 2026]." This section includes the table of contents for the Act.

Section 100 – Definitions
Provides definitions for key terms used throughout the Act, including "Associated Entity", "Compensation", and "Name, Image and Likeness Agreement."

Section 101 –Name, Image, and Likeness Protections
Creates a national right for athletes to earn compensation for their name, image, and likeness.

NIL Protections
Schools can only restrict students from entering into name, image, and likeness agreements if the agreement violates the school's code of conduct applicable to all students or if the athlete uses the school's facilities, uniforms, equipment, official logos, or similar indicia of the school without consent. Schools, conferences, and associations cannot use the NIL of any group of athletes to sell or promote products unless they receive an agreement from each athlete in the group

Mandatory Reporting
Students of, and prospective students who have been recruited to attend but have not yet enrolled in, a Division I school have to report NIL compensation greater than $600 per year to their school.

Right to Athlete Representation
Schools, conferences, and associations cannot retaliate against students by restricting their eligibility if they hire an agent.

Educational Resources
Associations must provide students and prospective students with educational materials about their rights under the Act.

Section 102 – Agent and Contract Protections
Amends the Sports Agent Responsibility and Trust Act (SPARTA) (15 U.S.C. § 7801 et seq.) to:

- Cap agent fees at 5 percent of the value of the contract
- Require contracts with agents and endorsement contracts to state the key terms of the contract, including what the student has to do under the contract and how much they will

be paid.

- Limit the duration of contracts with agents or schools, conferences, or intercollegiate athletic associations to the time period during which the student is eligible to participate in intercollegiate athletics.
- Prohibit agents from making materially false, deceptive, or fraudulent statements, including statements that misrepresent the value of a name, image, or likeness opportunity.
- Require agents to register with a state or professional sports league before representing a student.

Strong Enforcement Against Unscrupulous Agents and Bad Contracts
Athletes have a private right of action to enforce these agent and contract protections. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and State Attorneys General can also enforce the provisions of this section.

Section 103 – Agent Registry.
Requires athletic associations to maintain a searchable database of athlete agents that are registered with a state or professional sports league. Athletic associations can fine or decertify agents who violate the specific legal requirements. Decertified agents are prohibited from representing or contacting student athletes or prospective student athletes.

Section 104 – NIL Agreement Database
Requires institutions to report to their intercollegiate athletic association, in an anonymized manner, all NIL agreements reported by students under Section 3. The intercollegiate athletic association must then use that data to maintain a publicly available database for students and their agents to estimate the fair market value for NIL agreements. Institutions are also required to report to their intercollegiate athletic association data on the revenue and expenditures of each sports program, the average number of hours students in each sport spend on intercollegiate athletic events and competitions, and the academic outcomes and majors of students athletes participating in each sport.

Section 105 – Academic and Scholarship Protections
Academic and Coursework Protections
Prohibits athletic department employees from exerting undue pressure over a student's course or major selection and retaliating against an athlete because of the athlete's choice of classes or major.

Financial Literacy Protections
Schools that provide financial literacy and life skills programming to athletes cannot include marketing, advertising, referral, or solicitation offers in those programs.

Scholarship Protections
Prohibits schools from revoking, reducing, or conditioning athletic scholarships based on a student's athletic ability or performance, as a result of a student's injury or illness, or based on roster management decisions. Schools may revoke, reduce, or condition an athletic scholarship if a student transfers or is not meeting the school's academic standards, code of conduct, or athletics program policies.

Post-eligibility Degree Completion
Requires Division I schools to guarantee athletic scholarships to students for 10 years after they stop competing for the school so that the student can complete their degree.

Section 106 – Medical Coverage Requirements
Medical Coverage While Participating in College Sports
Requires Division I schools to cover all out-of-pocket medical expenses if a student is injured or gets sick through participating in an intercollegiate sport, and to provide catastrophic medical insurance if a student's medical costs for an injury or disease incurred through participating in an intercollegiate sport exceeds $90,000. Division I schools must also cover the cost of a second opinion if a student gets sick or injured from participating in an intercollegiate sport and must cover the cost of an end-of-college physical to document and diagnose any injuries or conditions related to the student's participation in an intercollegiate sport.

Post-Eligibility Medical Coverage
Requires Division I schools to cover all out-of-pocket medical expenses for any injury or disease incurred by a student participating in intercollegiate sport for 5 years after their last intercollegiate competition.

Medical Trust Fund
Require the NCAA to create a $60 million/year trust fund to help cover the cost of:

1. Providing the mandatory post-eligibility medical coverage for Division I institutions that generate less than $20 million in annual athletics revenue and have a demonstrated financial need.
2. Providing post-eligibility medical coverage for Division II and Division III institutions that voluntarily choose to provide such coverage and that have a demonstrated financial need.
3. Medical expenses for former student athletes who are diagnosed with significant, long-term conditions, like chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), due to their participation in an intercollegiate sport.

Section 107 – Health, Wellness, and Safety Standards
Health and Safety Standards
Requires institutions, conferences, and athletic associations to comply with standards to protect students from sports-relates serious injury, conditions, and death, including standards related to brain injury, heat-related illness, rhambdomyolsis, sickle cell trait, and asthma.

Preventing and Addressing Abuse or Misconduct
Requires institutions, conferences, and athletic associations to take reasonable actions to prevent, assess, and remediate the abuse, hazing, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, or sexual harassment of a student participating in intercollegiate sport.

Information on How to Contact Ombudsman
Requires schools and athletic associations to provide students with information about how to contact the association's Office of the Student Athlete Ombudsman (see Section 10).

Independent Health and Safety Officer

Requires schools to designate a health and safety officer responsible to oversee the school's implementation of the requirements in this section. The officer must be independent of the school's athletic department and report to an individual who is independent of the athletic department.

Independence of Medical Professionals
Prevents coaches or other non-medical personnel from ignoring or attempting to influence a medical official's decision about a student's medical treatment and whether or when a student can return to play.

Section 108 – Office of the Student Athlete Ombudsman
Requires intercollegiate athletic associations to establish an Office of the Student Athlete Ombudsman to provide students participating in an intercollegiate sport with free, independent, and confidential advice about their rights and responsibilities under this Act, about the role, responsibility, authority, and jurisdiction of their school, conference, or intercollegiate athletic association, and about the relative value of engaging legal counsel. The Office of the Student Athlete Ombudsman is also tasked with providing students participating in an intercollegiate sport with contact information for third-party resources and with assisting in the resolution of concerns between students and schools, conferences, or the intercollegiate athletic association.

Employees or other representatives of schools, conferences, or the intercollegiate athletic association are prohibited from retaliating against a student for contacting the Office of the Student Athlete Ombudsman. Additionally, the board of directors or other governing body of the intercollegiate athletic association is prohibited from preventing the Office of the Student Athlete Ombudsman from carrying out its duties under this Act.

Section 109 – Comparable Standards for Access to Facilities, Services, and Events
Requires intercollegiate athletic associations and conferences to provide comparable medical care, lodging, meals, rest, transportation, and facilities for championship events or tournaments for similarly situated men's and women's sports programs.

Section 110 – Mid-season Football Coaching Changes
Prohibits football head coaches and coordinators at Football Subdivision schools from leaving midseason to become the head football coach (or take another position with duties and responsibilities that are typically associated with a head football coach or coordinator) at another school that also competes in the Football Bowl Subdivision. If an individual violates this section, they are required to sit out for a year before becoming the head football coach at the hiring school and may be subject to additional penalties.

Section 111 – Student Athlete Representation on Intercollegiate Athletic Association Governing Boards
Requires at least 1/3 of the membership and voting power of any board of directors, governing board, or committee of an intercollegiate athletic association with authority to establish and enforce rules or bylaws to be made up of current student athletes or former student athletes that graduated within the last ten years. A former student athlete that is employed by a member school, conference, or intercollegiate athletic association does not count towards the 1/3 membership threshold.

Section 112 – Transfer Protections
Requires schools, conferences, and intercollegiate athletic associations to permit student athletes to transfer once without any impact to their eligibility. If a student athlete transfers a second time, they have to sit out a year. Athletes additionally may transfer without having to sit out because their sport was cut, their head coach left, they were sexually assaulted or harassed by someone associated with their sports team, or they have completed their undergraduate degree and are pursuing a graduate degree.

Section 113 – Eligibility Standard
Eligibility Requirements
Sets an eligibility standard for participation in intercollegiate sports. An individual is eligible to participate in an intercollegiate sport if they are:

1. A student athlete who complies with uniform academic standards set by their school, conference, or intercollegiate athletic association;
2. Not a professional athlete; and
3. Not in violation of established rules that restrict eligibility for violations of state or federal law.

A student athlete who competes in a sport other than football or basketball is not a professional athlete solely based on their place finish or performance in an athletic event, like a tournament, that is not sponsored by a school, collective, or associated entity.

Eligibility Restrictions Based on Conduct
Schools can prevent students from participating in intercollegiate sports if they violate the school's code of conduct applicable to all students or if they violate a rule, regulation or code of conduct applicable to all student athletes at the school.

Conferences and intercollegiate athletic associations can also prevent a student from participating in intercollegiate sports if the student used an illegal or performance enhancing drug or if they participated in sports betting.

Five Years of Eligibility
Student athletes can participate in intercollegiate sport for a period of five calendar years beginning in the academic year following the earliest of:

1. their enrollment at a school
2. their 19th birthday
3. their high school graduation date
4. their expected high school graduation date based on their first year of high school enrollment.

This five calendar year restriction does not count during a period of absence due to reasons of pregnancy, religious mission, active-duty military service; or another reason excepted by an intercollegiate athletic association that applies uniformly to all student athletes.

Parity for Athletes Transferring from 2-year Institutions

Conferences and intercollegiate athletic associations cannot have more stringent academic requirements for students transferring from 2-year colleges than for students transferring from 4-year colleges.

Individual Schools Can Set Higher Academic Standards
Individual schools are able to set additional or more stringent academic standards if those standards are required of all students enrolled at the school.

Section 114 – Prohibited Compensation and Agreements
Enforcement of the Revenue Share Cap
Prohibits schools and conferences that are parties to the *Grant House* settlement or have opted in to the settlement from arranging, providing, offering, or permitting compensation to athletes that circumvents the revenue share cap established in the settlement. This prohibition also applies to associated entities and collectives.

Prohibits Sham NIL Agreements
Schools, conferences, and associated entities, including collectives, are prohibited from entering into an NIL agreement with a student athlete or prospective student athlete unless the agreement is for a valid business purpose and the compensation provided to the student athlete is commensurate with compensation paid to individuals with a similar profile, reputation, or notability that are not student athletes or prospective student athletes.

Allowable Athletic and Education Benefits
Allows schools, conferences, intercollegiate athletic associations, or associated entities to cover the reasonable cost of certain personal benefits related to a student athlete's education or participation in intercollegiate athletic athletics.

Section 115 – Extension of the *House* Revenue Share Cap
Establishes that the revenue share cap in the *House* settlement will continue to apply to the schools or conferences that were parties to or opted in to the House settlement beyond the expiration or termination of the settlement. Following the expiration of the settlement, the revenue share cap will be adjusted annually for inflation.

Section 116 – Commission on the Future of College Athletics
Establishes a bipartisan Congressional Commission to study the future of college athletics, including athlete compensation, Olympic and women's sports, spending limits, health and safety, the extent to which student athletes face abuse or mistreatment, agent rules, and the long-term structure of college sports.

Section 117 – Recruitment and Tampering Restrictions
Tampering
Establishes a framework to govern recruitment and tampering. An intercollegiate athletic association, like the NCAA, is allowed to enforce provisions stating that conferences, schools, and collectives are prohibited from contacting a current student athlete for the purpose of recruiting that athlete to transfer to another institution outside of a set five-week period that begins seven days after the last intercollegiate athletic event in that student athlete's sport,

including any post-season intercollegiate athletic events like the College Football Playoff. An intercollegiate athletic association can also restrict agents representing a current student athlete from contacting a school to facilitate the student athlete's transfer to that school outside of the same five-week period.

Recruitment
Allows an intercollegiate athletic association, like the NCAA, to prohibit conferences, schools, collectives, or athlete agents from contacting student athletes or prospective student athletes that have not opted in to be recruited or contacted.

Inducements
Allows an intercollegiate athletic association, like the NCAA, to prohibit conferences, schools, collectives, or athlete agents from inducing students to enroll or transfer at a school by offering compensation that violates the potential restrictions on tampering and recruitment in the act.

Section 118 – Antitrust Limitation on Liability
Predictable Rules
Provides schools, conferences, or intercollegiate athletic associations with a narrow antitrust limitation of liability to the extent that they enforce the specific eligibility, transfer, recruitment and tampering, and mid-season coaching change standards set in the Act.

An intercollegiate athletic association also receives an antitrust limitation of liability for a specific institution's selection or non-selection to participate in a championship or tournament—so long as the process for selecting participants is not entitled to antitrust immunity

Revenue Share Cap
Provides schools, conferences, or intercollegiate athletic associations with an antitrust limitation of liability to enforce prohibitions against circumventing and exceeding the revenue share cap, including against collectives or other associated entities.

Bad -Actor Agents
Gives schools, conferences, or intercollegiate athletic associations a narrow antitrust immunity to decertify or fine an athlete agent for violating the agent protections in the Act.

Other
Gives schools a narrow antitrust limitation of liability to the extent they restrict the eligibility of a student athlete or prospective student athlete who entered into an NIL agreement that violates the schools' code of conduct or used the school's facilities, uniforms, equipment, official logos, or other indicia of the school in connection with an NIL agreement and without consent.

Finally, gives schools antitrust immunity for enforcing the requirement that student athletes and prospective student athletes report NIL agreements or compensation greater than $600/year.

Section 119 – Private Right of Action
There is a private right of action to enforce the following provisions of the Act:

- Section 101(a) and (c): student athletes' right to earn name, image, or likeness compensation
- Section 103: the requirements related to the agent registry
- Section 105: the academic and course protections and the 10-year scholarship guarantee.
- Section 106: the medical coverage and medical trust fund provisions.
- Section 107: the health, wellness, and safety standards and provisions related to independent health and safety and medical officers.
- Section 108: the creation and operation of the Office of the Student Athlete Ombudsman
- Section 110: the requirement that intercollegiate athletic associations provide similarly situated men's and women's teams with comparable facilities and services
- Section 111: the requirement that 1/3 of the governing board or other committee of an intercollegiate athletic association consist of current or recent former student athletes
- Section 112: the transfer provision, but only to the extent the provision was violated. This private right of action is limited to schools that compete in NCAA Divisions I, II, or III. This private right of action must be filed in federal court.
- Section 113: the eligibility provision, but only to the extent the provision was violated. This private right of action is limited to schools that compete in NCAA Divisions I, II, or III. This private right of action must be filed in federal court.
- Section 114(b): the provision allowing athletes to receive benefits for transportation, housing, meals, and other personal athletic and academic benefits.

If the plaintiff prevails, the court may award actual damages and any other relief, including equitable or declaratory relief, that the court finds appropriate.

Attorney's Fees
In a case brought under the private right of action, the court may award the prevailing party reasonable attorney's fees and litigation costs.

Pre-dispute Arbitration Agreement
Schools, conferences, and intercollegiate athletic associations cannot include a pre-dispute arbitration agreement in an agreement with a student athlete regarding a provision of this Act. An athlete has the option to choose arbitration at the time a claim arises.

Class Action Waivers
Conferences and intercollegiate athletic associations cannot enforce class action waivers against a student athlete or group of student athletes, so long as there are 7 named plaintiffs.

Opportunity to Cure
Before bringing a case under the private right of action, a person must first provide the defendant 60 days' written notice identifying the specific provision of this Act it alleges was violated. If the defendant cures the violation within 60 days, then the suit cannot be filed.

House Settlement Arbitration Exception
Claims related to whether a name, image, and likeness agreement is for a valid business purpose must be arbitrated through the *Grant House* settlement's arbitration process.

Additionally, for claims regarding whether a school, conference, or associated entity has exceeded the revenue share cap codified in Section 114, the school, conference, or associated entity must use the *Grant House* settlement's arbitration process.

Section 120 – Whistleblower Protection
Protects whistleblowers, including employees, student athletes, and prospective student athletes, from retaliation by schools, conferences, or intercollegiate athletic associations. Whistleblowers have a private right of action if they face retaliation for providing information about a violation of this Act to Congress, a Federal or State Agency, or a law enforcement agency.

Section 121 – Preemption
Preempts state laws that govern or regulate NIL compensation to student athletes or prospective student athletes, student athlete transfers between institutions, or student athlete eligibility. Other state laws are preempted only if they conflict with a provision of the Act that would prevent compliance with the Act.

Ensures that federal and state antitrust laws are not preempted except for the narrow limitations of liability in the Act.

Section 122 – Neutrality on Employee or Non-Employee Status
Clearly states that this Act is neutral on, and does nothing to alter, employee or non-employee status for student athletes.

Section 123 – Applicability
Clarifies that the Act applies with respect to any pending litigation or litigation brought after the date of enactment.

Section 124 – Severability
Clarifies that if any provision of Title I is struck down, the rest of the provisions of Title I still stand.

Title II – Sports Broadcasting

Section 202 – Definitions

Amends Section 5 of the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961 (15 U.S.C. 1295) to add and reorganize key definitions used throughout the Act.

Section 203 – Limitation on Liability for Transmission of Collegiate Sports Competitions

Amends the Sports Broadcasting Act to create a new antitrust exemption for college sports. Under current law, professional sports leagues like the NFL or NBA can pool and collectively sell their media rights. This section extends that same legal protection to college sports, allowing colleges and conferences to jointly negotiate and sell their media rights as a group and unlock new revenue.

Section 204 – Requirements for Entities Selling Media Rights

To take advantage of this new legal protection, colleges and conferences would join a qualifying organization ("covered entity") that negotiates and sells their media rights collectively. This section amends the Sports Broadcasting Act, establishing the conditions and requirements for the organization, including:

Condition on Antitrust Exemption

The antitrust exemption is conditioned on compliance with the requirements of this Act.

Membership Eligibility

The organization must include at least 75 percent of the schools that compete at the highest level of college football (Football Bowl Subdivision, or FBS). Any Division I conference or school must be offered membership on fair terms, but no one is required to join.

Voting Rights

Each member conference or school gets one vote. At least 10 current or recent student athletes (within the prior 10 years) also each get one vote on how revenue is divided. Key rules include: (A) major decisions require a two-thirds supermajority while routine decisions require a simple majority; (B) any change to how revenue is split or how votes are allocated requires unanimous agreement; and (C) decisions about which sports' media rights go into the pool also require unanimous agreement.

Revenue Allocation Formula

At least once a year, the organization must distribute the money it collects from media deals. The distribution formula works in layers: (A) first the organization must fund a catastrophic injury insurance program for student athletes; (B) every school must receive more money than the highest single-year amount it got between 2021-2025 (not counting College Football Playoff payouts); (C) at least 15 percent of what's left gets split equally among all FBS member schools; (D) the remaining money is then distributed based on how much each school's games contributed to the overall value of the media rights.

Protection of Women's and Olympic Sports

Any school that receives money from the collective deal must maintain at least as many scholarships and roster spots for women's and non-revenue generating sports (like swimming,

track, or wrestling) as it had in the 2024-2025 school year. Schools cannot cut these programs to pocket more of the media revenue.

Contribution of Media Rights
To receive a share of the revenue, schools and conferences must contribute their media rights to the collective pool. The organization then has the exclusive authority to negotiate, license, and sell those rights. Basketball tournaments run by the NCAA (like March Madness) are excluded from this arrangement.

Preservation of Conference Opponents and Traditional Rivalries
Requires schools, to the extent practicable, to play their top historic football rivals on a regular schedule, whether those rivals are in or out of conference. Schools with significant out-of-conference rivals must play at least two traditional rivalry games every four years and face one of their top-5 rivals from another conference each year. The covered entity can revisit these rules after eight years, and then only once every four years.

Voluntary Participation
No school or conference is required to join. Choosing not to participate cannot be used against them in any legal proceeding.

Section 205 – Market-Level Broadcast Access for College Football and Basketball
This section amends the Sports Broadcasting Act to require, as a condition of the antitrust exemption, that the covered entity make available for purchase or license, on a non-exclusive basis, at least one local outlet option for every college football and basketball game involving a member institution. A "local outlet option" means a free-to-the-viewer outlet that carries the game in the home market of each participating school.

Local Outlet Option
For every game, the covered entity must offer at least one local outlet the opportunity to license the game for free distribution to viewers within the local TV market (called Designated Market Area, or DMA) of any participating school. A national rights holder, like a major TV network such as ABC or FOX, can satisfy this requirement by distributing the game through a local affiliate it owns or is affiliated with that is freely available to viewers in the applicable market.

Designated Market Area Definition
A school's local market is the DMA where its main campus is located. The school and the network can also agree to include one additional neighboring or in-state DMA if a significant share of the school's students, alumni, or fans live there. The FCC must publish and keep current a public list of qualifying DMAs within 180 days of the law taking effect.

Good Faith Negotiation and Enforcement
The covered entity and any broadcaster, distributor, or licensee holding local rights must negotiate in good faith to make local access available. The FCC has the authority to hear complaints if a party fails to do so.

Section 206 – Prohibition on Certain Conference Mergers or Acquisitions
This section amends the Sports Broadcasting Act, establishing that any conference that had revenue in fiscal year 2025 of more than $1 billion is prohibited from merging with, acquiring, or

absorbing another conference if doing so would reduce the merged entity's membership below the minimum required to qualify under this law.

Section 207 – Amendments to Intercollegiate and Interscholastic Football Contest Limitations

This section amends the Sports Broadcasting Act to extend the protected college football season window on both ends: (A) the start of the protected window moves one week earlier, from the second Friday in September to the first Friday in September; (B) the end of the protected window moves one week later, from the second Saturday in December to the third Saturday in December; and (C) the entire college football season, must conclude no later than January 8, to the extent practicable.

Section 208 – Media Rights Utilization Requirement for College Sports Other Than Football and Basketball

When a media distributor acquires the rights to show college sports other than football or basketball, they must make the games reasonably available to the public within one year. If a distributor fails to show those games, the rights return to the original holder (the school or conference that sold them). Before the rights revert, the distributor has a 180-day curing period to use the rights. After the rights revert, the school or conference can resell or transfer them to another distributor without penalty or liability. This section does not modify any part of the Sports Broadcasting Act.