

Testimony of Coach Nick Saban – Hearing on June 3rd, 2026

In Support of The Protect College Sports Act

Executive Summary

- College sports needs national rules. An endless stream of lawsuits and state-by-state laws and cannot produce fair, national competition.
- We need a model that brings stability and improves the quality of life for student athletes while keeping college sports connected to education, development, and opportunity.
- The current system has hurt student athletes who miss out on personal growth, and it's hurt competitive balance. Too often, whoever can raise the most money can buy the best roster.
- Transfer rules need stability. Athletes deserve freedom, but teams, coaches, fans, and universities also need a system that allows programs to develop.
- I support student athletes benefiting from their name, image, and likeness. That was never a problem. The problem is when NIL becomes thinly disguised pay-for-play and limitless free agency.
- The bill protects student athletes' ability to earn NIL. It also protects them from being taken advantage of by unscrupulous, and creates an independent student athlete ombudsman, scholarship guarantees, and medical/health coverage.
- The bill also protects the broader college sports ecosystem that depends on stability in football and basketball, including women's sports, Olympic sports, non-revenue sports, and rivalries.
- Congress should act now. If we wait until every lawsuit is finished and every program has adjusted on its own, there may not be much of the old college sports model left to protect.

Testimony – As Prepared for Delivery

Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I'm not representing any conference or any team; I'm just a former college coach who cares about college sports. I have spent most of my adult life in college athletics. I believe in it because I have seen what it can do for young people. I have seen players come into a program needing structure, discipline, coaching, academic support, and accountability. I have seen them leave with a degree, a career, a family, and a better chance to be successful in life.

That is what college athletics is supposed to be about. It is not just about who wins on Saturday. For me and many of my colleagues, it was about developing young people.

I want to be clear at the start: student athletes should be able to profit from their own name, image, and likeness. I have said many times that student-athletes should be compensated for NIL. If a player earns a legitimate endorsement, builds a brand, signs with a company, or is paid for real promotional work, that is a good thing. It can improve their quality of life and help them build skills beyond sports.

But that is not the same thing as turning NIL into a pay-for-play system. It is not the same thing as using collectives and outside entities to create a bidding war for recruits and transfers. When the system becomes whoever raises the most money gets the best players, then we are no longer talking about college athletics as millions of fans and I have known it.

That is why I support the Protect College Sports Act.

This bill recognizes the difference between real NIL and disguised pay-for-play. It gives student-athletes a federal right to earn NIL compensation, but it also creates contract, agent, and enforcement rules so the system has integrity. That matters. Athletes and their families need transparency. They need to know whether a deal is real, what the student athlete is required to do, what the athlete will be paid, and whether the agents advising them are ethical and accountable.

The bill also addresses competitive balance. Every sport that succeeds over time has rules. The NFL has rules. The NBA has rules. Major League Baseball has rules. Rules do not destroy opportunity. Good rules make competition better, because everyone knows the framework and everyone can build within it.

Right now, college sports have no rules. There are different state laws, constant litigation, unclear enforcement, transfer instability, and an arms race that is dividing the top echelon of schools from everyone else and putting tremendous financial pressure on athletic departments that are losing tens of millions of dollars. That is not healthy for student athletes. It is not healthy for non-revenue sports. It is not healthy for fans. And it is not sustainable.

I also support the bill's approach to transfers and eligibility. Athletes should have real freedom. A young person should not be trapped in a bad situation. But unlimited transfer freedom, combined with pay-for-play incentives, has created something very close to unlimited free agency without contracts, without rules, and without stability. That makes it harder to build teams and harder to develop young people. The more a young man or woman transfers, the less likely they are to

finish their degree. The bill's one-transfer rule, with exceptions for legitimate circumstances, is a reasonable balance.

Another important part of this bill is that it does not only focus on football. Football and men's basketball generate most of a department's revenue, but college athletics is bigger than those two sports. Women's sports, Olympic sports, and other non-revenue sports create opportunities for thousands of young men and women. Those opportunities matter. They are part of what makes college athletics different from professional sports.

If all the money in the system is pushed into football payrolls and basketball payrolls, we will lose programs. We will lose scholarships. We will lose Olympic pipelines. We will lose chances for young people who may never play professionally but whose lives are changed by college sports. This bill takes that seriously by protecting women's and Olympic sports and by looking for ways to expand revenue for the broader system.

The scholarship and medical protections in this bill are also important. If a young person gives his or her body to a university program, then that young person should not be discarded because of an injury, a roster decision, or athletic performance. Scholarships should mean something. Medical coverage should mean something. Health and safety standards should mean something. Independent medical judgment should not be overridden by competitive pressure.

That is not just an athlete issue. That is a values issue.

The bill also helps preserve what fans care about. Fans care about rivalries. They care about regional traditions. They care about watching their teams. They care about the connection between the school, the players, and the community. Once they are gone, they are hard to rebuild.

Congress does not need to micromanage college athletics. But Congress does need to fix the mess in the courts and create a national framework so the people inside college sports can enforce fair rules. Without that legal certainty, every rule becomes another lawsuit, every standard becomes another risk, and the system keeps drifting toward a professional model without ever admitting that is what is happening.

I do not believe most fans want universities simply sponsoring professional teams. I believe they want an education-based model that compensates athletes fairly, protects athletes properly, and still preserves development, competition, opportunity, and tradition.

That is what this bill is trying to do.

It is not perfect. No bill on a subject this complicated will be perfect. But it is a serious, bipartisan effort to bring order to a system that badly needs it. It protects athletes. It protects opportunity. It protects competitive balance. It protects the sports that do not always make money but still matter. And it gives college athletics a chance to move forward with rules that are clear, national, and enforceable.

For those reasons, I support the Protect College Sports Act and urge Congress to act. Thank you.

Summary of Key Items in the Act

- **Protects scholarships and education.** Schools may not revoke, reduce, or condition grant-in-aid based on athletic performance, injury/illness, or roster management, and athletic departments may not unduly pressure academic choices. The ultimate goal is pushing student athletes toward an education and securing a college degree.
- **Protects true NIL.** It sets a national standard (no more state-specific carveouts for recruiting boosts). Student athletes can earn NIL compensation and hire representation, while the bill targets sham NIL deals used as recruiting, retention, or cap-avoidance payments.
- **Regulates agents and covers collectives.** The bill updates the federal Sports Agent Responsibility and Trust Act (SPARTA), requires agent registration/certification, standardizes NIL contracts between agents and student athletes, empowers the NCAA to sanction unscrupulous agents, caps endorsement-contract fees at 5 percent, creates consequences for false NIL promises, and covers collectives and associated entities used to route improper payments to student athletes.
- **Enforces and extends the revenue share cap.** The bill gives associations, conferences, and schools legal certainty to enforce the House settlement revenue share cap and prevent end-runs around it.
- **Creates an anonymized NIL market database.** Student athletes report NIL deals greater than \$600, institutions report NIL agreements in anonymized form, and associations maintain a searchable database to help athletes and agents estimate fair market value.
- **Creates enforceable transfer rules.** Students have one free undergrad transfer without losing or delaying eligibility; additional transfers may carry sit-out consequences unless an exception (like a head coach departure) applies.
- **Restores clear eligibility standards.** The bill creates a five-calendar-year eligibility clock, preserves academic standards, bars professional athletes from competing, and permits rules from the NCAA on eligibility for drugs, sports wagering, conduct, and prize money.
- **Stops tampering and recruiting chaos.** Associations may enforce rules limiting contact with enrolled or committed athletes and may prohibit inducements offered in violation of recruiting and tampering rules.
- **Lets rules actually be enforced.** The bill provides targeted antitrust protection for associations, conferences, schools, and officials that enforce or comply with covered rules, including sanctions for violations.
- **Protects student-athlete health and safety.** The bill requires medical coverage, post-eligibility coverage for covered injuries, a catastrophic-injury fund, health and safety

standards, abuse/hazing protections, independent return-to-play authority, and an Ombudsman.

- **Protects whistleblowers.** The bill prohibits retaliation against student athletes or employees who report violations or assist proceedings.
- **The SBA title is voluntary.** A pool media rights option if 75% of current FBS schools elect to participate.
- **Preserves rivalries.** If the pooled rights entity takes effect, the bill protects current conference rivalries and requires annual scheduling of at least one out-of-conference rivalry for schools whose most common opponents (top ten historically) are outside their conference.
- **Keeps games locally available.** Participating media-rights entities must make at least one no-charge local outlet option available for football and basketball games in participating schools' local markets.
- **Protects women's and Olympic sports.** Schools receiving collective media-rights revenue must maintain at least the same grant-in-aid opportunities and roster spots for non-revenue sports, including women's and Olympic sports, as in 2024-25.
- **Prevents warehousing of non-football/non-basketball rights.** Media distributors that buy rights for sports other than football and basketball must use those rights within one year or risk reversion.
- **Blocks certain super conference consolidation.** Large-revenue conferences cannot use mergers, acquisitions, media-rights rollups, or membership acquisitions to further consolidate power in violation of the bill's membership guardrails.

The goal is practical amateurism for the modern era: students can be compensated for bona fide NIL, but college sports remains tied to education, finite eligibility, team continuity, and fair competition. **That's why this is a win for fans, athletes, schools, and the future of college sports.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick L. Saban". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Nick L. Saban