



# THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

**BILL:** Senate Bill 439 - Public Institutions of Higher Education – Student Athletes (Jordan McNair Safe and Fair Play Act)

**SPONSOR:** Senators Ready and West

**HEARING DATE:** February 25, 2021

**COMMITTEE:** Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

**CONTACT:** Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

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**POSITION:** SUPPORT

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The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 439**, which would require all public 4-year institutions of higher education with athletic programs to provide a student athlete with scholarships for academics, athletics, or both, for 5 years or until the student athlete completes an undergraduate degree, whichever occurs first. It also requires an athletic program to renew the athletic scholarship if a student athlete suffers an incapacitating injury or illness under certain circumstances; prohibiting public institutions of higher education from taking certain actions against student athletes.

The sports world, along with our state, was shaken on July 16, 2018, when Baltimore native Jordan McNair, a four-star recruit, ranked in the top 25 nationally in his position, died from heat stroke while at football practice as a student athlete at the University of Maryland. The circumstances and tragedy following, what can only be described as negligence in the caring of our state's student athletes, leads us to the remedy provided by the proposed legislation.

Keeping our student athletes safe should be our number one priority. A vital part of that mission to keep them healthy, is creating an environment where they feel comfortable seeking medical attention or rest when their bodies demand it. The culture of playing through pain and injury has been fueled by the fear that some students feel, that when they are injured, they will lose their scholarships and with it, their chance of making a career out of their sport or obtaining a 4-year degree.

The proposed legislation ensures students do not intentionally have to risk their health, their body, or in the case of McNair, their life to preserve their scholarship, pursue their degree or one day play professional sports.

Our universities and colleges should be encouraging play, fun, teamwork, morals, commitment and safety in our athletic programs, and that begins with university leadership, athletic staff and coaches.

The proposed legislation seeks to remove the fear of retaliation from students already suffering from injuries, some life threatening. We should be encouraging their recovery and rehabilitation, not seeking retaliatory actions. It is time we get behind our students by supporting both their success and health, on and off the field.

For the reasons stated above, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 439** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.