



February 25, 2021

Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today to offer my support of SB. 439.

My name is Brian Hess, and I am the Executive Director of Sports Fans Coalition. Founded in 2009, SFC is a national grassroots non-profit advocacy organization devoted to representing fans wherever public policy impacts the games we love. We are best known for leading the campaign to end the Federal Communications Commission's sports blackout rule and have advocated before the Maryland legislature on ticket resale, sports betting consumer protections, and other issues.

The NCAA, sports apparel and merchandise companies, and media conglomerates earn billions of dollars in sports-related revenue each year, yet professes to operate in the name of so-called "amateurism." While college athletic programs often help students gain a college education, they too often extract economic gains from athletes while denying those young men and women a real chance to complete their degrees or otherwise share in the bounty created by the athletes' own blood, sweat, and tears.

Personally, when I was an undergraduate student at a public university, I tutored college athletes in the evenings. What I witnessed was disgraceful. The hours alone that my students had to dedicate to grueling workouts, frequent practices, extensive travel, and other team activities left them no time for academics. My students struggled to keep up with homework, study for exams, and reach their potential in the classroom. Outside of tutoring, if I saw one of my students walking in the rain across campus, I was strictly forbidden from offering them a ride as that would be seen as "a gift based on their status." In other words, I have seen first-hand the gap between what athletes provide to a state university and what that university offers in return. Mine is not an isolated experience.

These unreasonable restrictions on student-athletes are exactly why this bill is paramount to ensuring a positive student-athlete experience for Marylanders. A student-athlete should be able to earn compensation from their name and likeness. After all, it is their hard work that has created value for their brand, why shouldn't they be able to prosper from it? Students also sacrifice their bodies for their school, many of whom suffering from lifelong conditions. Athletic programs absolutely owe it to the athletes to provide for their health and safety because without the student's sacrifice, there would be no athletic program.



Today, college-athletes have no organized representation, no lobbyists, no one. Absent an advocate, it falls on the shoulders of the fans to stand up for our athletes against the exploitation of the NCAA. Maryland's college-athletes deserve more than the support of 40,000 sports fans. They deserve their representatives.

It is with that in mind that I urge the members of this committee to support SB. 439 and take this historic step to protect Maryland college athletes.

Thank you,

Brian Hess

Brian Hess
Executive Director