

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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**Chairwoman McCarthy Statement at Subcommittee Hearing on
“The Impact of Concussions on High School Athletes: The Local
Perspective”**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), chairwoman of the House Healthy Families and Communities Subcommittee, for a subcommittee hearing on “The Impact of Concussions on High School Athletes: The Local Perspective.”*

I’d like to welcome our witnesses to this hearing on student concussion safety.

As a nurse for over 30 years, I have seen firsthand the damage that can occur as a result of concussions in our young people.

Today we’ll examine how concussions, experienced by high school athletes on the playing field, are impacting their academic well being and quality of life.

We’ll also learn more about how schools and the medical community can provide appropriate management and support for these young student athletes.

One of the key priorities of the Healthy Families and Communities Subcommittee has been looking at how we can keep students safe and protected in school.

But this is the subcommittee’s first hearing looking at what happens on the athletic field, where many school injuries occur.

When a student suffers a concussion, a serious chain reaction can occur both on the field and in the classroom.

On the playing field, concussions can pose significant health risks to students.

While few states have laws, regulations or guidelines around concussions in high school athletics, the issue is gaining traction.

In fact there is a bipartisan bill currently pending in the New York legislature, supported by both Republican Senator Hannon from Garden City, and Democratic Senator Johnson of Port Washington.

Recently, Suffolk County also passed a resolution on this important issue.

High school athletes are at greater risk of sports-related concussions than college or professional athletes because their younger brains are more susceptible to injury.

While we do not have Nassau or Suffolk County data, the New York State Department of Health reports that between 2006 and 2008 more than 23,000 school aged youths in our state visited the emergency department or were hospitalized for concussions annually with the cost of their medical care approaching four hundred and eighty million dollars.

Nationally, in the last three school years, 400,000 concussions were reported in high school athletes.

And according to a recent Government Accountability Office report, this could be a low estimate.

Studies show that the prevalence of sport-related concussions is much higher than reported.

In fact, a recent study from doctors at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Bedford, Massachusetts and the Boston University School of Medicine, found that New York Yankee's famous slugger Lou Gehrig might not have had Lou Gehrig's disease.

These findings confirm a long-suspected connection between motor disease such as Lou Gehrig's and head trauma experienced in collision sports and combat.

A concussion, unlike a sprain or a broken bone, is not always easily detected.

Ninety percent of concussions occur without loss of consciousness.

Concussions can cause a range of symptoms, from altered mental status to physical symptoms such as headaches or dizziness to emotional changes like irritability and difficulty sleeping.

The number and type of symptoms vary widely for each person.

But unless a student takes time off the field after suffering a concussion, he or she may be prolonging their recovery and their success in school may suffer.

Unfortunately, we also know that the symptoms of concussions are not only difficult to detect, but are not always taken seriously.

Many times we hear "oh, it's just a concussion."

In the sports injury community, there is a saying: “When in doubt, sit it out.”

But a recent study shows that many students return to play too soon.

This is a problem that isn’t limited to student athletes.

College and professional athletes also feel the pressure to compete and stay in the game.

What we see here is pressure to play is overriding medical concerns and – potentially – a student’s academic future.

As we will learn more about today, failing to “sit it out” after a concussion can negatively affect students in the classroom sometimes causing symptoms to become worse when trying to focus on schoolwork.

Any parent can tell you that participating in sports doesn’t just get their kids moving – it gives them skills that will come in handy in school, on the job and throughout their lives.

During my school years I played field hockey, basketball, and volleyball and those experiences gave me a sense of confidence and teamwork which is so important.

Our goal today is to make sure that our kids can continue to participate in sports safely – and continue to reap the benefits both on and off the playing field.

Early intervention and response, by the proper evaluation and management of concussion will lessen the effects of this potential life threatening injury

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about what schools can be doing better to help support high school athletes, and testimony on the effects of concussions on student achievement.

Awareness and education hold the key to any solution.

As the Committee continues our work on reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, we must give serious consideration to the testimony before us today and determine how Congress can best move forward to prevent and treat concussion in our students.

Thank you all for being here and I look forward to your testimony.

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