



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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July 24, 2025

The Honorable Mike Ezell
443 Cannon House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Ezell:

On behalf of The University of Southern Mississippi and the Sun Belt Conference, I write to express strong support for the Student Compensation and Opportunity through Rights and Endorsements (SCORE) Act. This legislation represents a critical step in creating a sustainable future for college athletics, protecting student-athletes' rights and well-being, and ensuring fair competition across NCAA Division I.

Support NIL Uniformity, Student Status, Rule-making Authority, and Limited Safe Harbor

The current landscape of Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) has been marked by a chaotic patchwork of state laws and legal uncertainty. The SCORE Act addresses this directly by establishing a uniform national NIL standard, which is crucial for preventing institutions and student-athletes in different states from facing a competitive disadvantage.

Furthermore, the SCORE Act rightly reaffirms the student-first model by protecting student-athletes from being classified as employees of an institution or conference. This non-employment status is vital for preserving the integrity of college athletics and ensuring that the pathway to education and opportunity remains viable, as employment mandates could render some athletic programs financially untenable.

The bill is consistent with the recent House settlement and NCAA core guarantee legislation as it expands access to NIL opportunities, agent representation, privacy protections, financial transparency, medical care, degree completion, and other health, safety, and educational resources for student-athletes. It also explicitly prohibits pay-for-play and predatory agent compensation schemes.

We also welcome the Act's confirmation of the NCAA's rule-making authority in areas such as athletics eligibility timeframes, academic eligibility, and transfer requirements. The bill provides that each student-athlete may transfer between institutions and be immediately eligible on at least one occasion. Other transfer and eligibility requirements will be determined by the NCAA who will have the most accurate data around academic and graduation outcomes.

Finally, we commend the bill's intent to provide a limited and conditional safe harbor for conferences and the NCAA. This protection is essential for college sports to establish and enforce reasonable and uniform national competition standards.

Concerns and Suggested Amendments

While we strongly support the overarching goals and many provisions of the SCORE Act, we believe certain sections could benefit from amendments to ensure greater equity, feasibility, and sustainability, particularly for institutions outside the highest revenue-generating conferences, such as those in the Sun Belt. Concerns have been raised that, without appropriate guardrails, the codification of certain provisions from the recent settlement could accelerate the consolidation of resources and competitive advantages among a narrow subset of programs, risking unintended harm to Olympic sports, women's athletics, and non-autonomy conference programs.

I ask you to consider the following areas for amendment:

- **Salary Threshold Applicability (Section 5(c)):** The legislation would apply to any school employing a coach earning over \$250,000 in base salary. This could unintentionally not capture some Division I schools, leading to disparate impacts. The legislation should apply to all Division I institutions.
- **Medical Benefits Duration (Section 5(a)):** The requirement to provide medical benefits for injuries sustained during play for three years post-graduation is one year more than current NCAA bylaws require. The legislation should be amended to include two years of benefits to remain consistent with the current NCAA rules.
- **NIL Tax and Legal Counsel (Section 5(a)):** The bill requires schools to provide NIL tax-related counsel and legal advice, which is not required under current bylaws and creates a new, unfunded burden. Not to mention, this requirement places a new liability on our institution and staff.

Summary

The Sun Belt Conference is committed to the success and holistic development of our student-athletes. We believe the SCORE Act provides a strong foundation for the future of college sports, but targeted amendments addressing practical and equity concerns will ensure the legislation's positive impact across the diverse landscape of NCAA Division I.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these critical issues. My Sun Belt Conference colleagues and I stand ready to collaborate with you to refine this vital legislation.

Sincerely,



Joseph S. Paul, Ph.D.
President

cc: Jeremy McClain, Director of Athletics