

January 25th 2021

Delegate Brooke Lierman
District 46 (Baltimore City)
House Office Building, Room 311
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401



Dear Delegate Lierman:

Hello, I am Emmett Gill and I bring your greetings and prayers for good health from Athletes and Advocates for Social Justice in Sports (AASJS). AASJS proudly supports the Jordan McNair Safe and Fair Play Act (HB125). There are several outstanding components of HB125, however AASJS would like to focus on one area in particular - the proposed provision for four or five-year guaranteed athletic scholarships. AASJS believes that this provision is the foundation for college athletes rights in the state of Maryland.

As you are well aware, coaches and athletic directors receive millions of dollars in compensation and if by chance they are dismissed, then they receive multi-million-dollar lump sum payouts. However, college athletes are incredibly vulnerable because their scholarships are essentially one-year renewable grants. College athletes can lose the opportunity they have earned to obtain a college degree (and compete in college sports) because of a litany of circumstances outside of their control - for example because they were recruited by the previous coach or because they are not performing up to the coaches standard. When Jordan McNair passed away, he did so fighting for his scholarship in the midst of unrealistic physical and mental expectations.

Universities and athletic departments in the state of Maryland should be mandated to award guaranteed four or five-year scholarships for this and for several other reasons.

From 2004 to 2005, I served as a learning specialist for the University of Maryland football team. From my experience, I understand the challenges associated with trying to compete in NCAA sports and obtain a functional and constructive college degree. There are young men and women who dedicate over forty hours to their sport. After each day, and oftentimes exhausted and sometimes injured, they try to academically compete. As a learning specialist, I can distinctly recall working with young men, who didn't have the best secondary education, trying their best to academically compete with their peers who had far more resources. I truly believed that if they had more time that they could compete in the classroom. That is why providing an extra year of matriculation will help college athletes, in particular Black males, like Jordan McNair, not

just academically compete, but it will further help them earn a constructive college degree. It will allow them to refine their non-sport gifts - which is the true reason that they attend college

Further, providing a guaranteed four or five-year scholarship is ultimately a paper expense - there is no true cost to a university if a cohort of athletes matriculates for an additional year. NCAA and NCAA member institutions were willing to add an additional year of eligibility due to COVID because it was the right thing to do and so is providing guaranteed four or five-year scholarships as proposed in HB125. A guaranteed four-year scholarship, that includes an additional year would increase the likelihood that college athletes, in particular those in the revenue generating sports, will have a chance to major in disciplines that will not just lead to graduation, but to gainful employment and hopefully a fruitful career path. With the current system some athletes are not truly being educated. The degrees many college athletes, in the revenue-generating sports, earn require an advanced degree from schools that they are unlikely to be admitted to because they do not have a competitive GPA.

AASJS would like to make one additional point - any provision in HB125 that refers to physical health should also include mental health. Mental health coverage for college athletes, up to two years after graduation, should be mandated. The rigor of college athletics and academics, not to mention the tribulations caused by COVID-19 and the current racial unrest, are having an incredible negative impact on our college athletes mental health and wellness. College athletes would benefit from mandated mental health services two years after graduation.

In closing, AASJS fully supports HB125, as we reflect on the avoidable and tragic death of Jordan McNair, it's important that we realize the impact that a guaranteed scholarship could have had on his physical and mental well-being. If Jordan McNair knew he could have walked off the field because of his deteriorating physical condition and still maintained his scholarship until he graduated... is it plausible he would still be with us today?

Thank you for your time and your work.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emmett L. Gill, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Emmett L. Gill, Jr. PhD, MSW, LMSW
Athletes & Advocates for Social Justice in Sports