

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 465**

Gambling – Problem Gambling and College Athlete Protections  
*Before the Ways and Means Committee: February 6, 2025*

The Public Health Law Clinic submits this testimony in support of House Bill 465. In part, this bill seeks to prohibit player-specific propositional bets, also known as prop bets, on a participant in a collegiate sport or athletic event. Prop bets are wagers made on a specific player or event in a game or match that is not directly tied to the outcome of the game. Prop bets range from the number of rebounds an individual player makes in a game to the length of the National Anthem.

There is a growing concern that prop bets on collegiate athletes shift the focus from the team to the individual player leading to an increase in player harassment. In 2024, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) President, Charlie Baker, called on states to ban prop bets on college sports “to protect student-athletes and to protect the integrity of the game.”<sup>1</sup> In speaking to members of the Senate Judiciary Committee he noted that 10-15% of Division I athletes reported being harassed.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, athletes reported both receiving death threats, online and in-person, and demands for money from unhappy bettors.

Between 2023 and 2024, the NCAA conducted a pilot study to investigate the online abuse that college athletes, coaches, and officials experience.<sup>3</sup> The study monitored the social media accounts of 3,164 college athletes, 489 team coaches, 197 event officials, 165 team accounts, and 12 NCAA official channels.<sup>4</sup> Across all championships, 12% of abusive or threatening content contained references to sports betting and match-fixing. The Men’s and Women’s March Madness Championships contributed to 73% of the detected sports betting and match-fixing related abusive content. Strikingly, female athletes participating in the March Madness Championship received three times the amount of abuse as the men. To demonstrate the kind of abuse these athletes face, an online message an athlete received read, “Yo no big deal but if you don’t get 22 points and 12 boards everyone you know and love will Be dead”. This kind of harassment can lead to a range of mental health challenges including anxiety, depression, loss of confidence, panic attacks, and ultimately can cause suicidal tendencies and actions. The mental health of an athlete is impacted by not only the content of a message but by the volume. For example, one athlete received over 1,400 abusive messages in the span of 2 weeks.

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<sup>1</sup> David Ubben, NCAA president Charlie Baker wants ban on prop bets in college sports, *The Athletic* (Mar. 27, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5372615/2024/03/27/ncaa-president-charlie-baker-prop-betting/>.

<sup>2</sup> Becky Sullivan, *The president of the NCAA calls for a ban on ‘prop bets’ in college sports*, NPR (Dec. 17, 2024, 6:34 PM), <https://www.npr.org/2024/12/17/nx-s1-5231991/ncaa-charlie-baker-sports-gambling-regulations-senate#:~:text=The%20NCAA%20says%2010%20to,the%20field%2C%22%20Baker%20said.>

<sup>3</sup> SIGNIFY GROUP: BETTER DATA, ONLINE ABUSE IN NCAA CHAMPIONSHIPS: NCAA PILOT STUDY 2023–24, NCAA, <https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/ncaa/wagering/NCAAThreatMatrixPilotStudyPublicReport.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> The relevant social media accounts include X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, and Tik Tok. The NCAA championships included were the DI Women’s Volleyball Championship, FCS/ FBS Football Championships, DI Men’s and Women’s March Madness, DI Gymnastics, DI Women’s Softball Championships, and DI Men’s Baseball Championships.

Increasingly, states across the country are prohibiting player-specific prop bets in collegiate sports and athletics.<sup>5</sup> Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Vermont, Ohio, and Maryland all prohibit prop betting either through statute, regulation, or guidance. On February 26, 2024, the Maryland State Lottery and Gaming Control Agency put out guidance for betting operators to stop offering wagers on player-specific prop bets in collegiate sports and athletics.<sup>6</sup> While this is an important step in protecting college athletes, it is policy guidance that can be rescinded and does not provide the enforcement mechanisms necessary to hold violators accountable. Putting this policy guidance into law will provide permanent, enforceable protection for student athletes.

### **Conclusion**

Player-specific prop bets on collegiate athletics and sports have shifted the focus from the team to the individual and resulted in 18–22-year-old athletes experiencing increasing levels of abuse and harassment. This harassment can ultimately lead these athletes to struggle with their mental health. While Maryland has begun to respond to this issue by providing guidance, legally binding protections are necessary. For these reasons, we request a favorable report on House Bill 465.

*This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Public Health Law Clinic at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law and not by the School of Law, the University of Maryland, Baltimore, or the University of Maryland System.*

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<sup>5</sup> Dodd, *supra* note 1.

<sup>6</sup> Jeff Barker, *State told sportsbooks to stop offering bets on individual players*, THE BALTIMORE SUN, (Mar. 26, 2024).