



Proponent Testimony – House Bill 184
Ohio House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
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Chairman Young, Vice Chairman Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee. I thank you for the opportunity to submit interested part testimony on House Bill 184 or the “Marvin Harrison Jr. Bill.” I am Jim Cavale, President and Co-Founder of [Athletes.org](https://athletes.org) (AO).

Athletes.org (AO) is the leading players association for college athletes. We represent over 4,000 active Division I athletes. We empower AO member-athletes by amplifying their voices through member education and advocacy, providing them with free, on-demand support for the key decisions in their lives, and maximizing their income in innovative ways.

On behalf of AO and the thousands of college athletes across the Ohio and the nation, I would like to express our strong support for the protections provided to college athletes in Ohio in House Bill 184. Specifically, H.B. 184’s limitations on the ability of respective third parties to contract with an athlete after they are no longer eligible to participate in collegiate athletics are the kind of common-sense protections that we support.

More broadly, we believe that what H.B. 184 represents is a first step among many that we believe can only be achieved through a partnership between college athletes and their institutions, mirroring the operational structures of other multibillion-dollar sports and entertainment industries in America. This partnership must be collectively bargained, ensuring that both parties have a say in the rules and regulations that govern their interactions.

For over a century, the NCAA has represented the interests of its member schools, serving as the sole decision-makers and governing body for college athletics. Similarly, conferences such as the Big Ten and other conferences that include Ohio institutions further protect the interests of their member schools. However, the athletes' perspective has often been neglected, resulting in their interests being overlooked and them being denied the opportunity to share in the wealth they help create.

Thankfully, in the wake of several landmark cases, including the forthcoming *House Settlement*, the economics of collegiate athletics have shifted more favorably to college athletes – but with those shifts come potentially predatory actors that warrant interventions like those in H.B. 184.

While there have been great steps taken for college athletes thus far, this new landscape has also subjected many athletes to unfair, unconscionable, and exploitive NIL deals and contracts. The perfect example is the namesake of this bill, Marvin Harrison Jr., who allegedly signed a multi-year licensing agreement with Fanatics while he was only a 19-year-old sophomore student-athlete at Ohio State.

The agreement involved distributing 35,000 autographs and all naming rights related to the distribution of his jerseys. Even better to a 19-year-old student-athlete, it was for \$1.05 million. It sounds good, but if you signed — the contract lasted for four years, i.e., ***it goes all the way into your second year in the NFL***. Moreover, Marvin Harrison Jr. did not have a traditional agent and was represented by his father, Marvin Harrison Sr., a former NFL wide receiver and Hall of Famer. Harrison Sr. was involved in the negotiations and was the one who signed the term sheet on behalf of his son.

Obviously, the value of Harrison's name, image, and likeness has significantly increased since his sophomore year in college. This standard licensing deal, ***one he didn't even sign***, did not reflect his current worth as a drafted NFL player. Fanatics claimed Harrison Jr. publicly denied the contract's existence, leading to a lawsuit. Represented ***again***, by his father, Harrison Jr. eventually settled the dispute, though the terms were undisclosed. But there's a lot of other student-athletes who signed similar four-year deals at a lower value, and now have significant remorse and loss of earnings and are not have been able to settle or get away from these unfair contracts.

H.B. No. 184 aims to protect athletes by implementing term limitations on contracts that provide compensation for the use of their name, image, or likeness. Under this bill, contracts would not extend beyond the athlete's eligibility period or require compensation after eligibility ends. The bill also restricts intercollegiate athletes' agents from entering contracts that extend beyond the athlete's eligibility period and outlines fee and trust fund requirements. These are great steps, but they are not enough.

Harrison Jr. and other cases underscore the complexities of NIL agreements, highlighting the need for and importance of athlete involvement in rule-setting and collective bargaining to create a structured and accountable system for college athletics contracts, better education for student-athletes navigating these deals, and protections for the increasing number of financial and career pitfalls.

These protections can only be achieved through a partnership between college athletes and their institutions, mirroring the operational structures of other multibillion-dollar sports and entertainment industries in America. This partnership must be collectively bargained, ensuring that both parties have a say in the rules and regulations that govern their interactions.

To effectively advance college athletics, structured collaboration is essential. This includes managing major issues with sports currently, such as: the transfer portal and player eligibility, player compensation and financial protection, and player health, education, and safety. While this bill introduces some new protections, the successful implementation of these rules in all states hinges on the active involvement and participation of the athletes themselves.

Athletes must be empowered with access to the proper information and the ability to vote on the rules that directly impact them. This democratic process is essential for creating a system that truly reflects the needs and desires of the athletes. AO exists to facilitate this process, providing a platform for athletes to access the information they need to voice their opinions and collectively bargain with their institutions.

By aggregating the voices of athletes, AO serves as *the* players association for intercollegiate athletes – one who is built to negotiate with schools on equal terms – creating a structured set of rules for college athletics that can be enforced. This collaboration will help create a more organized and fairer environment for all parties involved, advancing college athletics to the next phase and benefiting both athletes and institutions. By organizing and uniting their voices, college athletes can ensure that their perspectives are considered in the decision-making process, leading to more equitable and effective policies.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on this important matter. I look forward to working with the sponsors of H.B. No. 184 and the relevant committees of jurisdiction to ensure that the interests of intercollegiate athletes are protected and advanced. Together, we can create a fair and accountable system that benefits both athletes and institutions, paving the way for the future of college athletics. Thank you for your time and consideration.