

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 of a five-year guaranteed athletic scholarship. AASJS believes that this provision is the foundation for college athletes rights in the state of Maryland.

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 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 believe that if they had more time that they could have competed 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.

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 incredibly 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?

Respectfully,

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