

TESTIMONY OF SEAN MOREY

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Good morning Chairman Miller and members of the Education and Labor Committee. Thank you for the invitation to participate in this important discussion addressing the health risks of concussion in youth and high school athletics. My name is Sean Morey. For over the past decade, I've lived my dream of playing in the National Football League. I was drafted as a wide receiver out of Brown University in the 7<sup>th</sup> round of the 1999 NFL draft to my hometown New England Patriots. I was a long shot. I realized quickly that if I wasn't going to be a starter, I had to find a way to earn a roster spot and contribute on Sundays to help my team win. I've survived playing in the NFL for longer than anyone expected, by doing a job most professional football players will admit they don't envy. I'm a Special Teams guy. The ability to overcome pain and ignore injury is an occupational requirement. My experience in the NFL has been incredibly rewarding, but it hasn't been easy. I've been cut eight times, played through my share of injuries, and suffered more concussions than I care to admit. However, during the course of my career I have played in every stadium in the NFL. I've played in NFL Europe, a World Bowl, 17 playoff games, 5 Conference Championships, a Pro Bowl, and two Super Bowls. Additionally, I serve as Co-Chair of the NFL Players Association Mackey-White Traumatic Brain Injury Committee (TBI) along with our Medical Director, Dr. Thom Mayer. I also serve as a member of our Executive Committee of the NFL Players Association (NFLPA) and as a member of our NFLPA Player Safety and Welfare Committee.

During Super Bowl Week in 2008, I was approached by Chris Nowinski, co-founder of Sports Legacy Institute, during which he told me about some disturbing new research about concussions and the potential long term cumulative effects of repetitive brain trauma. As a member of the NFLPA Players Safety and Welfare Committee, I felt compelled to do my part to research the issue and report back to our Union leadership. I spent the greater part of this past year and a half burning the candle at both ends to learn as much as I could about the effects of traumatic head injuries. Since that conversation with Chris, I've spent significant time discussing this issue with many different neurological and medical experts, athletic trainers, coaches, and players to gain a unique perspective on how to address the issue systematically and responsibly. We must all play a role to change the culture in our game to help make it safer for future generations. I've devoted my time to educate and protect players and give back to the game that has provided so much for my family.

The game of football has enriched my life immensely, but I also understand the harsh realities of the NFL and the brutal nature of our sport. Self preservation is an afterthought. The challenges we face playing this game builds character. We condition ourselves to value courage, mental and physical toughness, and resiliency. However, the science and awareness of brain trauma is advancing rapidly, and we need to significantly change the culture of how we manage brain

injuries in our game. Football, and other contact sports, can provide our youth the ability to conquer their limitations and learn valuable lessons in humility, respect, teamwork, and selflessness. We must preserve the integrity of our game, and ensure the game is made safer for future generations.

As NFL players, we recognize we serve as a model for millions of youth, high school, and collegiate athletes. The most profound impact we can have on youth athletes is to set a good example and encourage them to be honest with their team medical staff, coaches, and teammates about their brain injuries and take time to recover. Educational and awareness initiatives can inform parents, coaches, trainers, and athletes to help identify the many signs and symptoms of concussion so they can communicate effectively. No athlete should return to the same game or practice after sustaining a concussion.

Our brain is the most vital organ in our body. NFL players have downplayed symptoms because we believed a concussion was a temporary or transient injury. We just shook it off. It's still a challenge to get players to buy in. We all share a deep loyalty to our fans, our coaches, and our teammates to "complete the mission", or finish the game. As professional athletes, we aspire to gain the approval of the men we respect. We don't want to let our team down. We don't want to lose our jobs. However, continuing to play through a concussion can prolong the time it takes to recover, shorten our careers, and compound problems transitioning into life after football. Repetitive brain trauma, especially when there is inadequate time to recover, may cause permanent damage to your brain. Playing through a concussion is no longer a badge of honor, it's reckless. Reporting our concussion is not a sign of weakness, it's a responsibility we share to advocate for our own health and safety.

I've learned how to play this game from some of the most inspiring coaches in the league. During my career I played this game the way it's supposed to be played, flying around the ball and going all out every play for a very long time. Playing the game recklessly has taken its toll on my health. I had an exceptionally rough season last year. I was praying I'd come around all offseason, but I still couldn't hit anymore without getting injured. I've been suffering chronic headaches, intermittent migraines, and blind spots in my vision for almost a year now. I've utilized prescription medication to manage my injuries and in turn masked post concussive symptoms for a long time. I hadn't yet fully recovered and wasn't healthy enough to do my job effectively at the start of this season. And so, I retired on the eve of my twelfth NFL training camp. I felt like I was abandoning my team in the eleventh hour. It was the toughest decision of my life, but I made the right call for the good of the team, my family, and my own personal health.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the ways I am giving back to the game is by serving in a leadership role with the NFLPA and its Mackey-White TBI Committee. The NFLPA formed the Mackey-White TBI Committee last season to commission leading neurological and medical experts to interpret the science, support independent research, educate players, and make progressive changes in our game to advocate for the health, safety, and welfare of active and former NFL Players. I would like to thank and acknowledge the individual efforts and collective contributions of our group of experts who serve on our Mackey-White TBI

Committee. They have made significant contributions to pushing the science surrounding sports related concussions.

NFLPA Medical Director and Mackey -White Co-Chair Dr. Thom Mayer has worked tirelessly to protect our players and enhance scientific dialogue with the NFL Head, Neck, and Spine Committee to maintain inclusivity and transparency addressing this complicated issue. We are all working together to address concussions in our game at every level. Last year, Dr. Mayer initiated collaboration with the NFL mid season to implement stricter Return to Play Guidelines intended to reduce the risk NFL players take when returning to the same game or practice following a concussion. We have also collaborated with the CDC to build a Youth Concussion Poster as well to educate youth athletes about identifying the signs and symptoms of concussion so that the younger athletes, medical staff, parents and coaches are all speaking the same language.

We have worked together with the members of the new NFL Head, Neck, and Spine Committee to make progressive changes in our game to protect the players we represent. The NFLPA, NFL, and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have worked together recently to provide information that reflects scientific consensus about the short and long term risks of concussion. These risks can include problems with memory and communication, personality changes, as well as depression and the early onset of dementia. When a player sustains a concussion, there is a period of vulnerability where another impact can kill injured brain cells which could have otherwise recovered. Proper diagnosis and treatment is the key to recovery and safe return to play. Repetitive brain trauma, especially when there is inadequate time to recover can cause permanent damage to your brain.

Former athletes with a history of repetitive brain trauma, including NFL Players, have been diagnosed with a degenerative neurologic disease referred to as Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) at autopsy. The brain degeneration is associated with memory loss, confusion, paranoia, impaired judgment, impulse control problems, aggression, depression, Parkinsonism, and, eventually progressive dementia. The NFL and NFLPA are supporting independent research efforts, most notably at Boston University School of Medicine's Center for the Study of Traumatic Encephalopathy, targeted to identify specific risk factors and determine prevalence. The goal is to provide an effective means to diagnose, treat, and prevent CTE. The NFLPA and NFL will continue to work together to actively pursue definitive science to assure that we are doing everything possible to protect the interests of our players and their family's when it comes to health and safety.

Among the many initiatives intended to educate and protect NFL players, the NFL Players Association has also been a leader in raising awareness of sports-related concussions with youth athletes. NFL Players have made significant contributions in an effort to change the culture in our locker rooms and on the field to manage concussions properly in our game. The game of football provides a platform to teach valuable lessons and inspire our youth. As NFL Players, our greatest honor is to interact with our fans and impact the lives of others in a positive way.

The NFLPA has also partnered with apparel maker Muze Connects. Muze will design and create messages displayed on a designer T-shirts geared towards impacting the lives of countless youth,

high school and collegiate athletes whom we serve as a model for dealing with brain injury. The T-shirts deliver an important message to players, parents, coaches, fans and media reminding us that we all must play an active role in addressing this public health concern -- "What you do in life echoes in eternity."

As NFL Players, we are held accountable for reporting our own concussions promptly and taking the necessary time to recover, but we are also responsible for looking out for our teammates and ensuring youth athletes communicate with their coaches, athletic trainers, and teammates when they sustain a concussion. Playing through a concussion can prolong the time it takes to recover and increase the risk for permanent injury. We must work together to change the culture and make this game safer. As part of our NFLPA Grassroots Campaign to change the culture in our game, we are reminding athletes that if they have a concussion, "don't hide it, report it, and take time to recover."

With fan support and involvement from youth and high school football programs, our partnership will galvanize local communities all over our country to work together to raise awareness about concussions. Fans and athletes can wear our T-shirt proudly to demonstrate and share in the solidarity across NFL locker rooms, supporting our NFLPA Grassroots Campaign to help make our game safer. Former NFL Players have sacrificed so much to build this game. It is now our responsibility to protect football players on all levels and ensure the game we love is better for us having us all been a part of it. By raising awareness and supporting independent research for sports-related concussions, we leave an enduring legacy that will impact the lives of others for decades to come.