Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20515  
February 29, 2016

Sylvia Mathews Burwell  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

John King  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Burwell and Acting Secretary King:

Thank you for your continued leadership of your respective agencies. We are writing to voice our concern over the current state of high school athlete sports screening, in both public and private schools, across the nation. According to a number of recent scholarly articles on the subject, screening of athletes prior to participation in competitive sports through a sports physical often falls short of recommended medical guidelines. The inadequate health screening of athletes contributes annually to the untimely deaths of many young adults, especially those affected by structural cardiovascular abnormalities, such as Marfan syndrome.

High school athletes represent the most alarming cohort of individuals affected by sudden cardiac death, with an estimated incidence of once or twice per week. Structural cardiovascular abnormalities are the most frequent cause of sudden cardiac death, but when identified early and accurately are also highly preventable. A recent example of the need for consistent cardiovascular screening guidelines is Isaiah Austin, who was diagnosed with Marfan syndrome when entering the National Basketball Association (NBA) Draft and thus previously unaware that he was at risk for sudden cardiac death during his entire scholastic basketball career.

In order to efficiently and effectively address this growing public health concern, we would like to know what tools and resources the Department and Health and Human Services and the Department of Education have available to promote adequate physicals for high school athletes. Specifically, can a set of minimum sports screening guidelines be developed for states to potentially adopt? We hope that any screening guidelines for states developed in this regard would apply to both private and public schools so the safety of student athletes does not vary. Further, in the immediate future, what role can your agencies play in collaborating with stakeholders to promote public and professional awareness of the importance of adequate sports screening for structural cardiovascular abnormalities to reduce that annual number of associated preventable deaths by high school athletes?

Sincerely,

Mike Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress

Chris Van Hollen  
Member of Congress
Cedric Richmond  
Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee  
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress

Derek Kilmer  
Member of Congress

Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress

Luis V. Gutiérrez  
Member of Congress