



Supporting Athletes, Families and Educators to Protect the Lives of Athletic Youth (SAFE PLAY) Act of 2020

Issue

Each year, more than seven million high school students participate in school sports and many times a student athlete will make headlines for collapsing on the field from a cardiac-related event. Many competitive young athletes who suffer a sudden cardiac arrest have an undetected heart condition such as cardiomyopathy, a chronic disease of the heart muscle that affects the heart's ability to pump blood. Symptoms for cardiomyopathy are not always obvious, and the disease may stay undiagnosed for years. Tragically, some families are only made aware of the disease after their child collapses or dies. While an estimated 30,000 children in the United States are living with cardiomyopathy, not enough is known about the impact of this "silent killer," and too many at-risk athletes are not being diagnosed and properly treated.

The Supporting Athletes, Families, and Educators to Protect the Lives of Athletic Youth (SAFE PLAY) Act was introduced in February 2020 by Representative Bill Pascrell (D-NJ-09) and Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) to promote the safety of youth athletes. The bill (H.R.6007/S.3347) encourages the development of best practices to prevent, document, and address sports injuries and medical emergencies, including sudden cardiac arrest, which is commonly associated with cardiomyopathy.

Bill Summary

The SAFE PLAY Act is comprehensive legislation that focuses on various sports safety issues, such as heat exposure, CPR and AED training, concussion response, and energy drink consumption. It also specifically covers cardiac emergencies, and includes provisions for educating parents, schools, and health professionals about higher-risk heart conditions such as cardiomyopathy that are associated with sudden cardiac death. The SAFE PLAY act mandates important primary and secondary preventative measures that have the potential to save thousands of young lives.

Disseminate information on high-risk cardiac conditions and sudden cardiac arrest

The bill includes provisions for creating educational resources for school officials, school nurses, coaches, and parents to increase awareness of cardiomyopathy and other high-risk childhood cardiac conditions. The materials will be developed by patient advocates, health professionals, and federal representatives from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The materials will then be disseminated via state health and education departments, and also made publicly available on CDC's website.

Increase safety and reduce sudden cardiac arrest through AED and CPR training

Through the SAFE PLAY Act, states will have the ability to apply for grants to purchase automated external defibrillators (AEDs) and partner with nationally recognized organizations for CPR and AED training in public schools. Priority will be given to schools with demonstrated need, such those that do not already have an AED on school grounds or are located in areas that require additional time to receive emergency medical services.

Working with the CDC and Department of Education, the bill would also provide guidelines for setting up cardiac emergency action plans in schools and local youth athletic organizations.

Encourage surveillance research on cardiomyopathy and sudden cardiac death.

The bill bolsters surveillance by collecting data on a school's understanding of cardiomyopathy symptoms, extent of CPR/AED training, and AED placement using the CDC's School Health Policies and Practices Survey. The legislation would also gather national data on the incidence and prevalence of cardiomyopathy and other cardiac conditions that might affect youth athletes, the effectiveness of CPR training and AED usage in a cardiac emergency, the number of youth fatalities, and demographic information on fatalities. A report to Congress would be issued within 5 years of the bill's enactment.

Background

What is Cardiomyopathy?

- A chronic and sometimes progressive disease in which the heart muscle is abnormally enlarged, thickened, and/or stiffened.
- There are four main types of cardiomyopathy: dilated (DCM), hypertrophic (HCM), restrictive (RCM) and arrhythmogenic right ventricular (ARVC). Left ventricular non-compaction (LVNC) is increasingly being recognized as a fifth form.
- There are many causes for cardiomyopathies affecting children; it can be inherited through one or both parents or acquired through a viral infection or cancer chemotherapy.

Who has cardiomyopathy?

- It can affect any adult or child at any stage of life.
- It is estimated that there are at least 30,000 children living with some form of cardiomyopathy. According to the North America Pediatric Cardiomyopathy Registry, 1 out of 100,000 are affected annually.
- Numbers may be underestimated because many cases are not accounted for because cardiomyopathy is difficult to detect and may be missed.

How is Cardiomyopathy Related to Sudden Cardiac Arrest?

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is estimated that approximately 2,000 people younger than 25 will die of sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) every year in the U.S.
- Cardiomyopathy is a leading cause of sudden cardiac arrest, especially among youth during athletic participation.
- Most sudden cardiac deaths are caused by abnormal heart rhythms called arrhythmias, which is more common in advanced stages of cardiomyopathy.