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The Mike Ditka Hall Of Fame Assistance Trust Fund

Founded In 2004
Robert D. Krebs and Paul D. Tamraz, Co-Trustees; 501 (c) 3

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON THE
JUDICIARY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE LAW

HEARING ON

THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE'S SYSTEM FOR
COMPENSATING RETIRED PLAYERS: AN UNEVEN PLAYING
FIELD?

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COACH MIKE DITKA
FOUNDER
THE MIKE DITKA HALL OF FAME ASSISTANCE TRUST FUND
Written Testimony

Mr. Chairman and esteemed members of the Committee, I am Mike Ditka, and I thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee today.

Professional Football is an American institution and I am here to represent the players who built the NFL, which is now a billion dollar industry. Many of these former NFL players have late onset football related injuries and many exhibit a pattern of symptoms consistent with repeated serious brain injury over time, primarily pugilistic dementia and short term memory loss, along with other related traumatic medical injuries. They are currently suffering in silence with inadequate levels of help from the institutions that were put in place to help them. These players are not being appropriately protected or materially assisted by the NFL player's union.

I find it incomprehensible that the common man and the common fan knows that these former NFL players are being treated like dogs in a callous and uncaring manner while the NFL Player's Union endlessly debates the issue and does nothing material to help these guys. I feel that this is a real problem that has not gotten the attention or the resource allocation it deserves.

As a result of seeing multiple examples of this grave injustice firsthand, the The Mike Ditka Hall Of Fame Assistance Trust Fund was created in 2004 to help former NFL Hall of Famers and players, especially those with acute financial, medical, and other needs. The remainder of our funds are dedicated to disabled children at Misericordia.

The Mike Ditka Hall Of Fame Assistance Trust Fund and the Gridiron Greats Assistance Trust Funds share the same goals and have the same serious concerns for the well being of former NFL players, many of whom suffer from a wide range of football related ailments that we believe are directly or indirectly responsible for their current conditions. Furthermore, we believe that the institutions (NFL Player's Union) that have been put in place to help them have fallen short in the past despite the fact that they have more than adequate resources to help. We feel they can do more than they currently do to help.

Many former NFL players with the most acute current needs played in the early days of league, where documentation of medical problems was less diligent than today.

Recognizing that former players are hurt should not be seen as an attempt to point fingers or blame anyone in particular. Our goal is to be part of the solution rather than accept the status quo, which is the problem. It is our goal and our mission to create public awareness which helps us raise the funds that can then be directly allocated to help these guys who need assistance. Our mission is to stand up for the guys who are no longer able to stand up for themselves in order to act in a timely manner on their behalf. Endless debate, running in circles, studies and meetings have accomplished little to help while former players suffer.

Constructive goals are frustrated by a closed Player's Union bureaucracy that seems out of touch with the real day to day needs of the oldest of former NFL players upon whose blood, sweat and pain the league has built a billion dollar industry.

The Mike Ditka Hall Of Fame Assistance Trust Fund and the Gridiron Greats Assistance Trust Fund are working for the same goal and believe that the NFL Player's Union's prior lack of attention on this matter represents a substantial step backwards and abdicates the NFL's leadership in representation, communication and concern for the well being of its current and former players.

The following summarizes our concerns with the issue at hand. We believe members of the Subcommittee should examine the following points closely in order to gain a better understanding of this issue and take the appropriate steps to rectify this unacceptable state of affairs.

1. Why and where did this all start and why are we in front of Congress?
2. The numbers of former players in need is documented and identified – there are under 300 – with the collective resources of the parties involved why can't we solve this problem?
3. There are the resources and numbers – the problem has been identified and the problem can be rectified if the powers that be want to solve it – it can be done.

Please help us relieve burdensome circumstances.

In addition, to ensure that former players in need get the support and are provided with the resources they need, the Mike Ditka Hall Of Fame Assistance Trust Fund recommends that the U.S. House of Representatives:

1. Investigate the circumstances of former NFL players with specific focus on why they are experiencing such serious problems being turned down for disability / medical care when they need it.
2. Investigate delayed onset dementia, short term memory loss and the causality, correlation and relationship to repeated prior head injuries like those commonly experienced in football.
3. Investigate why this problem hasn't been solved in light of the tremendous financial resources of the NFL owners and Player's Union.
4. Investigate why there is a 12 year statute of limitations on player disability claims.
5. Investigate who made the determination that 12 years should be the limitation on claims for disabilities.
6. Investigate why so many former players are being turned down when they apply for help.

It all boils down to the difference between what is right and what is wrong. These are our people and we are asking for your support for a group of proud, dignified men who suffer greatly as a result of their injuries, many of which are directly or indirectly related to their careers in professional football.

We thank Congressmen Conyers and Smith and all members of the Committee, particularly Congresswoman Sanchez of California, for their leadership on these issues and look forward to working with members of the Subcommittee and the Full Committee to resolve the important, outstanding issues of health of former NFL players.

In summary, The Mike Ditka Hall Of Fame Assistance Trust Fund supports proactively addressing this issue. However, we have serious concerns with the NFL Player's Union's lack of action on behalf of injured former players who need help. It seems to me that we need a new approach.

Our objective is not find fault and lay blame. It is to have an open an honest discussion with all concerned parties and to create a solution that helps these guys today. In our view, the challenge is for all parties to recognize the situation and take appropriate actions to help the guys in need. Certainly between the resources all of us bring to bear we can find a solution that works for these guys.

I am proud to be part of this dialogue and my foundation and I want to continue to engage in productive dialogue with all parties interested in being part of the solution.

All that matters is seeing these guys get the help they need. The current structure has does not meet the needs of these guys and time is of the essence - now is the time to act, before it is too late.

Football does not need Mike Ditka. Mike Ditka needs football, and it has propelled me into places I never thought I would go in my life. With that, ladies and gentlemen of Congress, I submit to you that I'm not here for myself, which I have just expressed. Please take it upon yourself to help these people in need.

It's up to you.

I thank the Subcommittee again for its interest in this important issue. We look forward to working with Congress and the members of this committee on this issue.

Thank you very much.