

Abby Cahalan

January 11, 2009

Congressman C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
2453 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-2002

Dear Congressman Ruppersberger,

On December 15, 2009, New Jersey Congressman Bill Pascrell and New Jersey Senator Robert Menendez held a press conference on Capitol Hill in support of H.R. 1347, The Concussion Treatment and Care Tools Act or ConTACT Act. The legislation is intended to protect young athletes from concussion. Our 14-year-old daughter, Abby, a Maryland resident and a concussion victim, participated in the press conference at the request of Congressman Pascrell. We are writing today on Abby's behalf to urge you to support this extremely valuable legislation.

Two years ago, Abby, then 12-years-old, suffered a devastating blow to the head while playing youth soccer in Baltimore. She lives with headaches every day, can no longer play sports and is still in recovery today. Her situation is proof that a concussion does not discriminate. Young athletes are at risk of suffering a concussion just as much, if not more so, than older athletes. The difference is that a support system is in place to assist the pro or college athlete while there is nothing to support our most vulnerable young athletes down to the age of middle school. The ConTACT Act can help change that.

The ConTACT Act would direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to convene a conference of medical, athletic, and education stakeholders to establish a set of model concussion management guidelines within 2 years of enactment of the legislation. It also would provide for the adoption of computerized pre-season baseline and post-concussion neurological testing. These measures are intended to benefit school-aged children between the age of 5 and 18 years old.

It is our belief that treatment guidelines and baseline neurologic testing would have helped protect Abby. The concussion management guidelines would have taken the guesswork out of how we handled Abby immediately following the concussion. Neither we nor her coach understood the severity of the impact on the brain. Believe it or not, we allowed Abby to play the remainder of the game. We didn't respond appropriately because we simply didn't know any better. The baseline testing would have provided a tool to measure the severity of Abby's concussion and would have assisted her physicians in more rapidly developing an appropriate treatment regimen. As it was, we wandered in the dark for months trying to figure out what was wrong while our daughter suffered.

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As a member of the Congressional Brain Injury Task Force, we ask on Abby's behalf that you examine the simple provisions of the ConTACT Act. We urge you to support the legislation as it moves through the process and consider co-sponsoring the bill with Congressman Pascrell. For your reference, we have attached a copy of the Baltimore Sun article detailing the December 15 press conference with Congressman Pascrell and Senator Menendez, as well as a copy of the legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jack and Joyce Cahalan