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September 26, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20502

Dear President Trump:

This weekend, I was deeply troubled to hear you use one of the harshest insults of your presidency so far to describe football players, mostly men of color, peacefully protesting racial injustice. This is especially disturbing given that you have described some torch-wielding, White Supremacists as “very fine people.” During your speech, I was also completely taken aback by your commentary encouraging increased violence in football. These comments endanger player safety and completely contradict extensive scientific study. Rules protecting the health of players do not ruin the game of football. Hard hits do not improve the game. The safety of players should be paramount and encouraging violence in the game endangers their wellbeing.

Concussions are much more than “a little ding on the head” as you said during your campaign. Even repeated and sub-concussive blows to the head, commonplace in football, have been shown to cause lasting neurodegenerative diseases like chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). This serious disease includes symptoms of impulse control problems, aggression, depression, and paranoia. As time passes, CTE continues to degenerate the brain resulting in memory loss, confusion, impaired judgment, and eventually progressive dementia.

In March 2016, the NFL acknowledged the link between football and CTE.¹ According to an on-going study at Boston University, researchers have found CTE in more than 99% of the brains of NFL players studied many of whom have committed suicide.² Just last week, it was disclosed that former Patriots tight end Aaron Hernandez had “severe” CTE at the time of his death.

¹ Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Roundtable: Broad Review of Concussions, March 14, 2016. <https://energycommerce.house.gov/news/press-release/broad-review-concussions-initial-roundtable/>.

² Mez, Jesse; Danschvar, Daniel; Kiernan, Patrick; Clinicopathological Evaluation of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy in Players of American Football. JAMA. 2017;318(4):360-370. July 25, 2017. <http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/2645104>.

It is inexcusable to deride systemic efforts to improve player safety. There are real consequences for your reckless comments and players will pay the price. The time for denying facts and looking the other way is over. We must now actively seek out ways to protect the health and wellbeing of players from Pop Warner to the NFL and every league in between.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jan Schakowsky", written in a cursive style.

JAN SCHAKOWSKY
Member of Congress