

Testimony of ESPN, Inc.

State of Connecticut General Assembly
Raised Bill No. 981

March 27, 2017

ESPN, Inc. (ESPN) is the leading multinational, multimedia sports entertainment company featuring the broadest portfolio of multimedia sports assets. Based in Bristol, Connecticut and with 4,200 employees in the state, in 2016, ESPN produced more than 64,000 hours of live event and studio programming across platforms. Among other things, ESPN is an active member of the news media, engaging in considerable investigative reporting, including on matters regarding sports. ESPN also produces hard-hitting documentaries like its Academy Award and Peabody-winning 30 for 30 series. ESPN prides itself on reporting accurate information regarding sports and the news surrounding sports.

Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) are frivolous claims brought to discourage free and fair reporting by forcing a news media outlet or other public commentators or critics to undertake the burdensome expense of defending themselves in court. Such lawsuits are time-consuming and distract news media outlets from their core function of informing the public.

Raised Bill No. 981, which establishes a special motion to dismiss, including an expedited hearing process, in civil SLAPP proceedings, will help ensure that ESPN and other news media outlets accomplish their critical mission of informing the public by discouraging burdensome SLAPP claims that are intended to hinder open discourse and waste time and money. By making it easier for judges to throw out frivolous claims opposing a party's right to free speech or the right of association or to petition the government, it will also help the overburdened courts in the State of Connecticut. ESPN is also committed to working with the Committee to address any concerns about this measure before it comes to the floor.

ESPN therefore urges the Committee to join the majority of states (and the District of Columbia) that have enacted anti-SLAPP legislation and pass Raised Bill No. 981.