

**TESTIMONY OF RON JAWORSKI**  
**BEFORE THE**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH**  
**OF THE**  
**COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE**  
**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**DECEMBER 16, 2009**

Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member Deal, and Members of the Subcommittee on Health,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on an issue of great importance to me, to my foundation and to the National Football League – the epidemic of childhood obesity.

I am proud to testify before you today in two capacities. First, I represent the United Way Jaws Youth Fund, a partnership my family created more than ten years ago with the United Way of Camden County, New Jersey. Through the United Way JAWS Youth Fund, I am proud to have delivered more than \$3 million in 10 years to more than 70 non-profit organizations providing services to children ranging from the ages of 7-18.

In addition, I am testifying on behalf of the National Football League and its signature community relations initiative, the PLAY 60 campaign. Launched in 2007, the PLAY 60 campaign is a national youth health and fitness campaign focused on increasing the health and wellness of young fans and combating childhood obesity by encouraging youth to be active for at least 60 minutes a day.

Mr. Chairman, the facts surrounding childhood obesity are startling. Nearly one in three children and teens in the U.S. are obese or overweight. That is more than 23 million youth. In the last two decades, the rate of overweight children has doubled.

We know that youth who are overweight or obese are more likely to have health risk factors associated to cardiovascular disease such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and type II diabetes. In contrast, the benefits of good health translate to the classroom where studies show that fit students are less likely to have disciplinary problems. Healthy students also perform better on standardized tests.

It is possible that these facts, while shocking, should not come as such a surprise when we consider that more than 60% of children ages 9–13 do not participate in any organized physical activity during non-school hours. The number of idle children is increasingly significant when schools around the country find it challenging to offer physical education classes. Sadly, 50% of the schools do not provide physical education in grades 1–5; 75% do not provide for grades 6–8.

This is not a new issue for me. You may remember, Mr. Chairman, back in 1989 the New Jersey public schools were considering the elimination of physical education classes. I lent my voice to the campaign against that proposal and became a spokesperson to keep gym in school. We were ultimately successful and physical education remained a requirement in New Jersey public schools.

One of the best examples of the type of health and wellness activity that the Jaws Fund supports is Steve's Club in Camden, NJ. In addition to being the most dangerous city in the country, Camden's childhood obesity rate is a staggering 60%. The United Way Jaws Youth Fund is proud to help fund Steve's Club, an organization that provides fitness training to Camden kids, giving them a place to get their bodies healthy and stay off the streets.

My favorite Steve's Club kid is Jose Henriquez. Former gang member turned fitness guru, Jose has been working out at Steve's Club for four years. He recently turned 19 and received his

official personal trainer certification. He trains kids in the Club, and also visits schools in Camden City (driving a van bought by the United Way Jaws Youth Fund) training kids in school. He even brought in his best friend Rick a few years back who became a member of the club and lost 50 pounds!

On a broader scale, I would like to discuss the NFL's PLAY 60 initiative and describe for you some of the terrific work they – and all of their member clubs - are doing in this area. PLAY 60 is a multi-disciplinary campaign that addresses the issue of childhood obesity through national outreach and online programs, as well as grass roots initiatives implemented via the NFL's in-school, after-school and team-based programs.

NFL PLAY 60 was designed to build on the league's and teams' long-standing commitment to health and fitness. The NFL decided to focus on the issue of childhood obesity because it recognized not only the public health crisis facing our nation, but also the NFL's unique place in our culture and its ability to influence attitudes and behaviors – especially among young fans.

Since the inception of PLAY 60 in 2007, the NFL has committed more than \$200 million to youth health and fitness through media time for PSAs, programming, and grants. This year alone, more than 700 events have been hosted by all 32 NFL teams who implement PLAY 60 in their local markets. NFL PLAY 60 is also supported year round by many of the NFL's most prominent players, including Drew Brees, Eli Manning, DeMarcus Ware, Jason Witten and Troy Polamalu.

NFL PLAY 60 promotes the importance and fun of getting 60 minutes of physical activity per day. Kids are encouraged to find their own ways to get active – whether it's taking advantage of the local playground, playing 4-square in the school yard, or establishing a walking club with friends. PLAY 60 presents organized sports – including youth football – as a very good way to get active, but certainly not the only way.

Through the league's PLAY 60 Super Bowl Contest, for example, 12 year old Jared Doult from Erie, Pennsylvania, took his family to Arizona two years ago and enjoyed the unique experience of being on the field and handing the game ball to the official to kick off Super Bowl XLII. Since then, Jared's goal has been to make his family and his school healthier. He formed a PLAY 60 club at his middle school that will launch this January. At home, he ensures that he and his 6-year-old sister plays outside regularly, even coaching her soccer team after school.

The Super Bowl contest is only one example of the NFL's year-round commitment. The NFL PLAY 60 initiative is a prominent part of all NFL calendar events – including Super Bowl, Pro Bowl, Draft, Kickoff and Thanksgiving Day.

With South Florida hosting the Pro Bowl this year, the NFL is asking all of its All Star players to fan out across the community on a single day to complete youth health and wellness oriented projects. The NFL PLAY 60 Pro Bowl Community Blitz will involve NFL Pro Bowl players building playgrounds, hosting youth football clinics, and leading healthy cooking demonstrations. I look forward to participating in the Blitz and being part of such an exciting project – which is illustrative of the type of work the NFL is doing in this area.

I have attached to my testimony descriptions of some of the programs the NFL supports in its PLAY 60 initiative.

Mr. Chairman, I commend you on holding this hearing and focusing Congressional attention on this vital public health issue. I look forward to working with you and members of the subcommittee and look forward to answering your questions.

Key NFL PLAY 60 programs are outlined below:

**NFL PLAY 60 Challenge** is the NFL PLAY 60 in-school curriculum, created in partnership with the American Heart Association. The NFL PLAY 60 Challenge teaches educators and children to integrate health and fitness into daily classroom lessons. The NFL PLAY 60 Challenge provides 50 short activities that teachers can weave in throughout the school day and kids can implement at home.

**NFL Take a Player to School** allows kids to bring the ultimate 'show-and-tell' to their classrooms each year. Lucky students in 34 cities nationwide win the chance to arrive at school with an NFL player and to design the Ultimate NFL Gym Class with that player. Together, the NFL player and the winning student lead classmates in fitness activities and talk about the importance of good health and smart food choices.

**Mini ReCharge!** is a youth fitness program produced by the NFL and Action for Healthy Kids. Packed with action and loaded with fun, Mini ReCharge! kits are full of activities designed to get kids on their feet and energized. The kits are distributed nationwide to schools, after-school programs, and local community groups.

**Fuel Up to Play 60** is an NFL and National Dairy Council program that supports student-fueled efforts to bring about healthy changes within their schools. This program shows student teams how they can responsibly and effectively engage key school and community leaders to create healthy school environments.

**Keep Gym In School** is the NFL Network's PLAY 60 program, working with Verizon Fios, Comcast and Cox Cable to adopt and deliver high quality, daily physical education opportunities to schools in four school districts across the U.S. Keep Gym In School provides support as needed to upgrade facilities, hire certified Physical Education instructors, and supply equipment for Physical Education classes. In addition, schools nationwide can compete for ten \$1,000 grants to support physical education in their school.

**The NFL PLAY 60 Super Bowl Contest** allows young fans to explain how staying active helps them live better lives. One lucky child who submits a short essay about the role of health and fitness in his/her life will win the ultimate prize – a chance to run on field with the game ball and hand it to the referee in front of millions right before kickoff at Super Bowl.

**NFL Flag Football, NFL Punt, Pass and Kick,** and the **NFL Girls Flag Football Leadership Program** encourage all young fans to be active and fit. In addition to these year-round programs, special **NFL PLAY 60 Youth Football Festivals** during major events such as the Draft, Kickoff, Super Bowl and Pro Bowl allow thousands of children to get active alongside NFL superstars. Kids in underserved areas of NFL markets also get the chance to engage in PLAY 60 activities through new and refurbished fields, courtesy of the **NFL Grassroots field grant program.**

**Hometown Huddle** is the NFL's annual league-wide day of service held in October in partnership with United Way. All 32 teams – including players, coaches, owners and staff – host a service project in their local community. Since 2007, these projects have reflected the NFL's commitment to getting kids active and healthy; teams use this day to build playgrounds, refurbish gymnasiums and teach kids about the importance of healthy living.

**All 32 NFL teams are heavily engaged in PLAY 60.** Players make school visits to talk about the importance of health, host youth fitness events, construct youth fitness zones, and film public service announcements. Whatever forms the community outreach may take, the message is the same: NFL teams and their players know the importance of youth health and fitness.