

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 14, 2026

Commissioner Val Ackerman
350 Fifth Avenue
The BIG EAST Conference
New York, NY 10118

Dear Commissioner Ackerman,

As former collegiate student-athletes, we have been deeply involved in the conversations regarding the challenges facing intercollegiate athletics, as well as the possibility of Congressional action on the issue. Amidst these conversations, it is increasingly clear that schools with shared values, academic priorities, and comparable resource models are best served by governing collectively and competing within the same conference.

As alumni and fans of these two universities, we write to respectfully encourage the Big East Conference to consider Saint Louis University (SLU) and the University of Dayton (UD) for membership, given their strong alignment with the Big East's institutional mission, competitive athletic profiles, and long-term strategic interests in the evolving collegiate athletics landscape.

Both Saint Louis University and the University of Dayton share the core institutional values that have long defined the Big East: they are mission-driven universities with deep commitments to academic excellence, community engagement, and the holistic development of student-athletes. These Jesuit and Marianist universities would also add to the rich Catholic legacy that the Big East and its members have cultivated.

Athletically, SLU and UD are natural fits. Each program emphasizes men's and women's basketball as flagship sports, consistent with the Big East's basketball-centric model. The University of Dayton and Saint Louis University have consistently been top performers in the Atlantic 10 conference, including on-field accomplishments, investment in athletic infrastructure, and fanbase engagement. The University of Dayton has consistently ranked among national leaders in basketball attendance and has a proven ability to support high-level competition. Saint Louis University has made significant investments in its competitive

programs, opening a \$20 million, 25,000 sq ft athletic facility in 2024, positioning itself for continued growth and stability.

Equally important, both institutions enhance the Big East's media and market footprint. Saint Louis represents one of the nation's largest and most influential sports markets (24th DMA), with no NBA team, offering meaningful opportunities for media exposure, corporate partnerships, and alumni engagement. Dayton has shown an exceptional ability to punch above its weight in attendance, ranking 15th in average attendance in 2024-2025 while selling out the entire season for the fourth consecutive year, and postseason competitiveness, an attribute that has long been a hallmark of successful Big East programs.

In an era defined by realignment pressures and shifting national dynamics, the Big East's strength has been its cohesive identity, competitive balance, and institutional alignment. Saint Louis University and the University of Dayton would reinforce that model. Both schools bring stability, tradition, and a demonstrated commitment to excellence that would strengthen the conference's position as the premier basketball-focused league in collegiate athletics.

Thank you for your consideration. We appreciate the Big East's leadership in preserving a model that values competition, academic integrity, and long-term sustainability, and we respectfully submit that Saint Louis University and the University of Dayton represent strong partners in that continued success.

Sincerely,



Eric Schmitt
United States Senator



Jon Husted
United States Senator