



FBS Football Coaching Severance: Symptom of Broken Financial Framework **(updated Nov. 4, 2025)**

Since the College Football Playoff (CFP) began in Fiscal Year 2015, Knight-Newhouse data show that severance pay for fired Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) football coaches at FBS public institutions has nearly **quadrupled** (*see Figure 1 below*). Severance pay for FBS football coaches at public universities in **Fiscal Year 2024 exceeded \$120 million, the highest figure since this data reporting began in Fiscal Year 2012.**

With the reported firings and related severance for **this current 2025 season (Fiscal Year 2026)**, a **new high in FBS football Coach severance** is expected to be set. Media reports indicate that the current severance pay obligations for fired FBS head football coaches this season is nearly **\$184 million for just 11 coaches** (*see Table 1 at the end of this document*). This current severance amount is subject to mitigation in some cases and could decrease.

Actual Severance Pay for Fiscal Year 2024 Exceeded \$120 Million at FBS Public Institutions, A New Record that Will Likely be Shattered in Fiscal Year 2026 **Figure 1**



Source: Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database. Data reported by institutions on NCAA Financial Report forms. *Note: Severance includes football head and assistant coaches, which included 11 “countable football coaches” per institution beginning in the 2017-18 fiscal year. Prior to fiscal year 2018, the limit was 10.

Amy Privette Perko, CEO, Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics

"As Congress debates the merits of federal legislation to place limits and guardrails on college athlete compensation, it should also examine the conditions that allow for the continued growth of excessive compensation and severance for football coaches at non-profit universities."

Fiscal Year 2026 (current 2025 season) On Track to Set a Record

- It is expected that **severance pay will hit a new high when financial reports for Fiscal Year 2026** are available since media reports show that FBS public universities' severance obligations to fired head football coaches **are nearly \$184 million to date** (*see Table 1 below*). This current severance amount is subject to mitigation in some cases and could decrease. However, increases are likely with the addition of assistant coaches' severance pay.
- These severance obligations include the second, third, and fourth highest severance amounts ever paid out to former head football coaches (*see Table 1 below*).
- Actual data for Fiscal Year 2025 (2024 season) are not yet available, but media reports indicate that total severance for that fiscal year was lower than Fiscal Year 2024 with only three Power 4 head football coaches fired, and a reported \$34.7 million in head football coaching severance at FBS public institutions (*see Table 2 below*). The actual severance will likely be higher due to including severance for assistant football coaches.
- Actual and reported severance to FBS football coaches at public universities during the College Football Playoff era (beginning January 2015/FY2015) has hit \$980 million. With Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026 expected to be higher with the addition of assistant coaches' severance pay, it is projected that the total severance to FBS football coaches will exceed \$1 Billion in the College Football Playoff era.

Ballooning Severance Proves to Be Indefensible Symptom of Broken Financial Framework

- The staggering severance payments made to fired FBS football coaches continue to be a major symptom of a dysfunctional financial model at FBS schools.
- The record severance obligations for this season come when the NCAA, athletic conferences, and member institutions are lobbying Congress for unprecedented legislation that would grant the organization an antitrust exemption, among other provisions, to limit costs associated with college athletes. To date, the NCAA, conferences, and institutions have not discussed using an antitrust exemption to set spending limits to control the costs of coaching salaries or severance payments.
- As of October 2025, reported severance pay obligations for FBS head football coaches already exceed projections made using financial and historical data. In September 2023, the Knight Commission published [an independent analysis produced by CLA](#) of

projected athletics expenses for public FBS athletics programs using historical expense data and projected revenue growth. **In this 2023 report, the Commission warned that “moving forward with business-as-usual spending patterns of the past will create a future that is entirely incongruent with the mission of college sports.” Unfortunately, the spending patterns have not changed and they have worsened.**

The CLA projections for FBS football coaching buyouts provided two different approaches: 1) projections based on historical severance growth rates and 2) projections based on severance pay as a percentage of revenue, which is the more conservative approach. The reported severance related to FBS football coach firings made in this current football season -- **\$183.5 million to date** -- will surpass the projections using either approach.

Potential Solutions

- On October 27, 2025, Rep. Michael Baumgartner (R-WA) introduced the [Correcting Opportunity and Accountability in Collegiate Hiring \(COACH\) Act](#), which would limit the annual compensation of any athletics department employee to no more than 10 times the institution’s annual in-state costs for a full-time undergraduate student.
- The Knight Commission’s proposed financial framework (our [2021 C.A.R.E. Model](#)) provides a solution for conferences to implement greater financial accountability and for conferences and institutions to tether their athletics programs more closely with the educational mission.
 - Our [C.A.R.E. Model](#) would enable conferences instituting new financial frameworks in accordance with C.A.R.E. Model principles **to implement penalties on schools and teams for excessive coaching severance and compensation**. This type of system would be **akin to “luxury taxes” in pro sports**. Based on Supreme Court precedent, such a conference-based approach would not violate antitrust laws.
 - The C.A.R.E. Model financial framework ensures more athletics revenues are connected to the core mission—athletes’ education, health, safety, and success. **To date, five Division I conferences have implemented the C.A.R.E. Model framework and achieved C.A.R.E. Champion distinction: America East Conference, Big Sky Conference, Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference (MAAC), Summit League, and The Southern Conference.** Additionally, the Patriot League has received a C.A.R.E. Model Conference Grant and is scheduled to achieve C.A.R.E. Champion status in December 2025. More information can be found [here](#).

Knight-Newhouse Research on Football Head Coach Severance Pay for FBS Institutions only

Table 1 – FY26 (2025 Season) – Based on media reports (as of Nov. 3, 2025)

***NOTE: Some of the following severance payments are subject to mitigation so the amounts may change.**

Institution	Fired Coach	*Current Severance total (In Millions)	Source
LSU	Brian Kelly	**\$54	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/46756301/168m-dead-money-buyouts-owed-fired-fbs-head-football-coaches-2025
Penn State	James Franklin	**\$49	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/46756301/168m-dead-money-buyouts-owed-fired-fbs-head-football-coaches-2025
Florida	Billy Napier	**\$21	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/46756301/168m-dead-money-buyouts-owed-fired-fbs-head-football-coaches-2025
Auburn	Hugh Freeze	\$15.8	https://www.foxsports.com/stories/college-football/auburn-reportedly-fires-hc-hugh-freeze-midst-3rd-season
Oklahoma State	Mike Gundy	\$15	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/46756301/168m-dead-money-buyouts-owed-fired-fbs-head-football-coaches-2025
Arkansas	Sam Pittman	\$9.8	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/46756301/168m-dead-money-buyouts-owed-fired-fbs-head-football-coaches-2025
Virginia Tech	Brent Pry	\$6	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/46756301/168m-dead-money-buyouts-owed-fired-fbs-head-football-coaches-2025
UCLA	DeShaun Foster	\$5	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/46756301/168m-dead-money-buyouts-owed-fired-fbs-head-football-coaches-2025
Oregon State	Trent Bray	\$4	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/46756301/168m-dead-money-buyouts-owed-fired-fbs-head-football-coaches-2025
UAB	Trent Dilfer	\$2.4	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/46756301/168m-dead-money-buyouts-owed-fired-fbs-head-football-coaches-2025
Colorado State	Jay Norvell	\$1.5	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/46756301/168m-dead-money-buyouts-owed-fired-fbs-head-football-coaches-2025
GRAND TOTAL		*\$183.5	

**** These amounts are the second, third, and fourth highest severance pay obligations in history. The highest severance payment was made to former Texas A&M head coach Jimbo Fisher at \$76 million.**

Table 2 - FY25 (2024 Season) – Based on media reports (Actual FY25 data will be available in spring 2026)

Institution	Fired Coach	Severance total (In Millions)	Source
West Virginia	Neal Brown	\$9.8	https://247sports.com/college/west-virginia/article/what-does-wvu-owe-neal-brown-for-his-buyout-240823548/
Purdue	Ryan Walters	\$9.3	https://www.indystar.com/story/sports/college/purdue/2024/12/01/ryan-walters-buyout-how-much-will-purdue-pay-to-fire-football-coach-contract/76688518007/
Florida Atlantic	Tom Herman	\$4	https://www.cbssports.com/college-football/news/tom-herman-fired-by-florida-atlantic-two-seasons-into-job-owls-2-8-in-2024-6-16-overall-during-herman-era/
East Carolina	Mike Houston	\$3	https://247sports.com/college/east-carolina/article/mike-houston-ecu-football-what-pirates-owe-going-forward-238376299/
North Carolina	Mack Brown	\$2.8	https://keepingitheel.com/how-much-is-mack-brown-s-buyout-from-the-unc-football-program
UMass	Don Brown	\$1.4	https://www.nepm.org/regional-news/2024-11-20/umass-owes-fired-football-coach-don-brown-a-buyout-up-to-1-4m
Charlotte	Biff Poggi	\$1.3	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/42473278/charlotte-fires-coach-biff-poggi-two-seasons-sources
Florida International	Mike MacIntyre	\$1.1	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/42722496/florida-international-fires-mike-macintyre-three-seasons
Southern Miss	Will Hall	\$0.9	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/41911928/southern-miss-fires-head-coach-hall-14-30-record
Ball State	Mike Neu	\$0.6	https://www.thestarpress.com/story/sports/college/ball-state/2024/11/16/mike-neu-buyout-what-did-it-cost-ball-state-football-to-move-on/76242255007/
App State	Shawn Clark	\$0.5	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/42741583/appalachian-state-fires-coach-shawn-clark-five-seasons
GRAND TOTAL		\$34.7	