Conyers also wants to look into due process for athletes, the NCAA's use of athletes' images in video games

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee is urging the panel to hold hearings on antitrust and other issues in college sports, including the recent series of conference realignments.

"It has become increasingly clear to me that the combination of issues and challenges facing intercollegiate sports have reached a tipping point calling for congressional attention," Michigan Rep. John Conyers wrote to the committee chairman, Texas Republican Lamar Smith, in a letter released Thursday. The committee said in a statement that it is reviewing Conyers' request.

Several major colleges have recently announced plans to switch conferences, including Syracuse and Pittsburgh from the Big East to the ACC, and Texas A&M from the Big 12 to the Southeastern Conference. The Big East now wants to expand to 12 football teams. Critics have

voiced concerns that the shuffling could lead to a handful of 16-team "superconferences" that could break away from the NCAA or dictate looser rules to stay competitive. The moves have raised new questions about the role of money in college sports.

Conyers said in his letter that he was concerned about the impact that conference realignment would have on lower-profile sports teams and smaller and independent universities - especially historically black colleges and universities.

The NCAA did not immediately return email and telephone messages Thursday, but President Mark Emmert recently told The Associated Press he was concerned about the perception that money is driving the decisions, saying, "this is not the NFL, the NBA, it's not a business." He urged school presidents to consider factors besides revenue when choosing conference affiliation.

Conyers also wants to look into due process for athletes, the NCAA's use of athletes' images in video games without compensation, limitations of athletic scholarships, and the costs to players from injuries sustained during games among other issues.

He said he understood that some committee members might have reservations about delving into these issues.

"I would note, however, that modern-day college athletics is a massive business, with widespread economic impact on athletes, their families, broadcasters, and fans as well as universities and colleges all over the country," Conyers wrote.