

April 6, 2022

ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL CALLS ON NFL TO ADDRESS GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION

Chicago — Attorney General Kwame Raoul today joined a coalition of six attorneys general expressing grave concerns about recent reports of the National Football League's (NFL) hostile workplace culture. Recent reports indicate that more than 30 former employees have now come forward and described a pervasive culture of sexism and widespread workplace discrimination within the NFL including, but not limited to, sexual harassment, targeted retaliation, and harmful stereotyping. In a letter to NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, Raoul and the coalition call on the league to take swift action to improve workplace conditions and protect female employees.

"Nobody deserves to be discriminated against or feel unsafe in their workplace, no matter who or how powerful their employer," Raoul said. "I urge the NFL to address these ongoing claims of gender-based discrimination and take steps to ensure every person, regardless of gender, feels safe and respected – no matter their role. I am committed to continuing to oppose discrimination and harassment of any kind in the workplace."

In February 2022, the New York Times published reports from over 30 former employees of the NFL, describing a hostile workplace for women. Female employees reported that they were subjected to repeated viewings of the Ray Rice video – which showed the Baltimore Ravens running back punching and knocking unconscious his then-fiancé in an elevator – with commentary by coworkers that the victim had brought the violence on herself. In a training intended to improve sensitivity on the issue, women were reportedly asked to raise their hand to self-identify if they had been victims of domestic violence or knew someone who had.

Female employees describe experiencing unwanted touching from male bosses, attending parties where prostitutes were hired, facing unfair criticism based on stereotypes, being passed over for promotions based on their gender, and being pushed out of their jobs for lodging complaints about discrimination. Following their departure, some employees even learned that discrimination complaints had never been recorded.

[In today's letter](#), Raoul and the coalition urged Commissioner Goodell to explain this continued inaction to address these issues. If true, the NFL's failures may violate local, state, and federal antidiscrimination laws, which prohibit employers from discriminating against women, people of color, and domestic violence victims, or subjecting them to a hostile work environment. Raoul and the coalition will use the authority of their offices to investigate and prosecute all allegations of harassment, discrimination, or retaliation by employers throughout their states.

Joining Raoul in in the letter are the attorneys general of Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, and Washington.



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DIVISION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE
CIVIL RIGHTS BUREAU

April 6, 2022

Roger Goodell, Commissioner
National Football League
345 Park Ave
New York, NY 10154

Dear Commissioner Goodell,

We write to express our grave concerns about the recent allegations in the New York Times by over thirty former employees of the National Football League, who described a workplace culture that is overtly hostile to women. We, the attorneys general of New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, and Washington State, are deeply committed to enforcing federal, state, and local antidiscrimination laws that protect workers and further equality of opportunity for employees throughout our states. With 1100 employees at the N.F.L., 37% of whom are women and 30% of whom are people of color, it is imperative that you ensure that all employees are treated equally, fairly and with the dignity they deserve. In New York, where the NFL is headquartered, the Office of the Attorney General has never hesitated to take action to protect employees from sexual harassment and abuse, whether they are entry-level employees of the Weinstein Company or servers and bartenders at Batali-owned restaurants.

We all watched in horror in 2014 when the video of Ray Rice striking, knocking out, and spitting on his fiancé was made public. In the aftermath, you promised to take gender violence seriously and improve the institutional culture for women at the N.F.L. These recent allegations suggest that you have not. Female employees reported that they were subjected to repeated viewings of the Rice video, with commentary by coworkers that the victim had brought the violence on herself. Other women reported that, in a training intended to improve sensitivity on the issue, they were asked to raise their hand to self-identify if they had been victims of domestic violence or knew someone who had. This is NOT doing better. Antidiscrimination laws in many states, including New York, prohibit employers from subjecting domestic violence victims, as well as women and people of color, to a hostile work environment.

In addition, female employees told the Times that they were held back and criticized for having an “aggressive tone”—an often unfair stereotype of women, especially women of color, who try to advance in a male dominated workplace. This comment is particularly ironic coming

from a manager at the N.F.L., where aggression is prized and celebrated on the field. Other women described experiencing unwanted touching from male bosses, attending parties where prostitutes were hired, being passed over for promotions based on their gender, and being pushed out for complaining about discrimination. In fact, some former female employees have since learned that there were no records of their complaints of gender discrimination.

All of this is entirely unacceptable and potentially unlawful. The N.F.L. must do better—pink jerseys are not a replacement for equal treatment and full inclusion of women in the workplace. Our offices will use the full weight of our authority to investigate and prosecute allegations of harassment, discrimination, or retaliation by employers throughout our states, including at the National Football League.



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