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Contact: Terry L. Fromson
Women's Law Project
215-928-5771



Title IX Advocates Request Review of Penn State's Handling of Sexual Harassment and Violence Allegations Implicating Athletes



This week ten legal organizations submitted a letter to the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education requesting a Title IX Compliance Review of how Penn State responds to sexual harassment and violence allegations. The letter also calls for routine reviews to determine whether schools across the country respond differently to complaints of sexual harassment and violence when athletes and athletic department members are implicated. The request was made by the Women's Law Project, California Women's Law Center, Legal Voice, Equal Rights Advocates, National Women's Law Center, Equity Legal, Legal Aid Society—Employment Law Center, Women's Sports Foundation, American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania, and Southwest Women's Law Center.



The letter follows recent reports that Penn State failed to properly respond to allegations of sexual abuse by an assistant football coach, and that the athletic department may have ignored standard procedures when their athletes were accused of wrongdoing. The letter emphasizes schools' obligation to consistently follow procedures that comply with Title IX and to not make exceptions when athletes or athletic department personnel are involved. The letter cites research revealing that universities have tried to conceal the involvement of student athletes in cases of sexual harassment and violence.



In April 2011, a "Dear Colleague" letter from the Office for Civil Rights reminded schools that procedures for dealing with complaints of sexual harassment and violence "must apply to all students, including athletes."

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