

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 20, 2021

Marla Messing
Interim CEO
National Women's Soccer League
1556 S. Michigan Avenue, Floor 2
Chicago, IL 60605

Cindy Parlow Cone
President
U.S. Soccer Federation
1801 S. Prairie Ave.
Chicago, IL 60616

Dear Ms. Messing and Ms. Cone:

We write regarding the National Women's Soccer League's (NWSL) handling of sexual harassment and abuse claims. We are troubled by a series of recent allegations demonstrating a pattern of systemic harassment and abuse within the league. We urge the NWSL and its players to work together to conduct a thorough investigation into these claims.

As you know, four NWSL coaches have been fired in the past three months. In July, Farid Benstiti, then head coach of O.L. Reign, was asked to resign after a player reported that he had made inappropriate comments. In August, Christy Holly, then-head coach of Racing Louisville, was terminated after players reported a toxic environment. On September 28, Richie Burke, head coach of the Washington Spirit, was fired for verbally and emotionally abusing players. Just two days later, on September 30, Paul Riley, then-head coach of the North Carolina Courage, was fired after reports of sexual harassment and misconduct were made public.

In this latest case, the NWSL was notified multiple times of harassment claims against Mr. Riley, who was suspended as coach of the Portland Thorns in 2015 following reports of misconduct from players but not further disciplined. This pattern of abuse and inaction constitutes an institutional failure to support and protect the rights and safety of players.

We appreciate that the U.S. Soccer Federation is opening a formal, independent investigation of allegations and the league's response headed by former acting U.S. Attorney General Sally Yates. We are also pleased that Riley was removed from his position with North Carolina Courage and that U.S. Soccer has suspended his coaching license.

The NWSL Players Association (NWSLPA) has asked that 1) every coach, general manager, owner, and representative on the NWSL board of governors to submit to the NWSLPA's independent investigation into abusive conduct; 2) the scope of the NWSL's investigation be expanded to include each of the 12 NWSL clubs represented on the Board of Governors; and 3) the investigation determine whether any league office staff, NWSL club, or individual in a position of power within the NWSL neglected to investigate concerns of abuse raised by any player or staff. We urge all parties involved in this matter to work together in good faith as the investigation continues. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Deborah K. Ross
Member of Congress

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress

Lois Frankel
Member of Congress

Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress

Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress

Katherine M. Clark
Member of Congress

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

Doris Matsui
Member of Congress

Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

Nikema Williams
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

Greg Stanton
Member of Congress

Al Lawson
Member of Congress

Kaiali'i Kahele
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Suzan DelBene
Member of Congress

Tom Suozzi
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Rick Larsen
Member of Congress

Kathleen M. Rice
Member of Congress

Mary Gay Scanlon
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David E. Price
Member of Congress

Kathy Manning
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Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress

Jason Crow
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

Alma S. Adams, PhD
Member of Congress

Peter Welch
Member of Congress

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

CC: Meghann Burke, Executive Director, NWSL Players Association