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Dear Principal,

High school sports instill valuable life lessons. They teach our children that practice, self-sacrifice, and commitment lead to success; that collaboration and teamwork lead to achievement; that losing with honor is more praiseworthy than winning by cheating; and that sportsmanship means abiding by the rules and being humble in victory and gracious in defeat.

To ensure that our athletic fields and gymnasiums allow those character-building concepts to flourish, the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR) and New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) entered into a groundbreaking memorandum of understanding (MOU) in 2013.

Five years later, we are writing to reconfirm our shared commitment to this essential undertaking. We ask that you direct your staffs to re-read the by-laws (particularly Article IX "Sportsmanship") and remind you that by virtue of membership in the NJSIAA, these policies become the policies of your school. Please ensure that your coaches, staffs, and students are informed of these policies and pledge to uphold these principals of fairness, decency, and sportsmanship.

Under the MOU, NJSIAA agreed to amend its by-laws to declare that verbal or physical harassment related to race, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, or religion by any person—e.g., athlete, coach, staff member, or spectator—will be deemed a violation of the Sportsmanship rule and subject violators to discipline and ejection. NJSIAA also agreed, among other things, to (a) provide training to game officials to make certain that they vigilantly enforce the amended Sportsmanship rule and ensure that violations are penalized; (b) provide training to athletes and school officials on the amended Sportsmanship rule; and (c) warn athletes and spectators at each event that such conduct will not be tolerated. For example, before each game or match, the officiating crew is required to read the following statement to the team captains:

The [NJSIAA] requires officials to enforce all rules regarding unsportsmanlike conduct by coaches and players. There will be no tolerance for negative statements or actions between opposing players or coaches. This includes taunting, baiting, berating opponents, or "trash-talking" or actions which ridicule or cause embarrassment to them. It also includes verbal, written, or physical conduct related to race, ethnicity, and gender. If such comments are heard, a

penalty will be assessed immediately. We have been instructed not to issue warnings. It is your responsibility to remind your team of this policy.

Likewise, the host school is required to read a public statement to spectators that notes, in part, "Any profanity or comments of a racial, ethnic, or sexual nature directed to athletes, officials, coaches, team representatives, or other spectators will not be tolerated and are grounds for removal." Such a requirement for schools hosting events is consistent with the obligation of places of public accommodation under the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination to ensure that individuals attending and participating in these events are protected from discriminatory conduct.

Under the 2013 MOU, the NJSIAA also amended its by-laws to give it authority to require schools, leagues, conferences, or the Controversies Committee to investigate and report any such incidents to the NJSIAA, which retains the authority to conduct its own investigation and take whatever action it deems appropriate. The NJSIAA notifies DCR of all such incidents. Like the NJSIAA, the DCR retains the authority to conduct its own investigation and take whatever action it deems appropriate.

To be sure, the 2013 MOU was a bold initiative—the first of its kind in the nation. But even the best initiatives can benefit from being reaffirmed from time to time. Particularly in light of recent events, it is important that you join us in sending a message to the public, to student-athletes, and to parents, coaches, and all other stakeholders that we are united in our commitment to upholding the tenets of acceptance, civility, and good sportsmanship, and to keeping bias and hate out of interscholastic athletics. Thank you.



Craig Sashihara, Director
NJ Division on Civil Rights



Larry White, Executive Director
NJ State Interscholastic Athletic Assoc.