

WOMEN LEGISLATORS CALL FOR STRONGER RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN NFL

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TRENTON – Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg (D-Bergen) and Senator Jennifer Beck (R-Monmouth), along with a bi-partisan group of women legislators from the Senate and Assembly, held a press conference at the Meadowlands Sports Complex today to call for stronger action in response to the recent cases of domestic violence in the National Football League and the failure of the league to appropriately respond.

“What we have seen over the last month involving cases of domestic violence in the National Football League is incredibly disconcerting. Sadly, the savage assault by Ray Rice on his then fiancée is just one in a string of mishandled incidents involving the NFL,” said Senator Weinberg. “The league on too many occasions has turned a blind eye to the crime of domestic violence carried out by its players. It has demonstrated an attitude of indifference that, despite its recent and long-overdue attempt to reform its policies, has for too long been ignored. We have to send a message that complacency on this issue will not be tolerated.”

“Our country often idolizes professional athletes, particularly football players, giving them a special status that physicians, teachers, politicians and astronauts do not enjoy. That is why the NFL’s response is so critical,” said Senator Beck. “Roger Goodell never saw fit to develop a comprehensive policy to deal with domestic violence. He is the standard bearer and should be let go.”

Senator Weinberg called on the federal government to remove the tax-exempt status of the league that allows it to avoid paying millions of dollars in taxes each year, and to dedicate the tax funding that would be received to domestic violence prevention. The SAVE Act (Securing Assistance for Victim Empowerment, S-2816), recently introduced by U.S. Senator Cory Booker, would accomplish this by revoking the tax exempt status for the NFL and a number of other professional sports leagues. Revenue received by closing this loophole would be dedicated to domestic violence prevention. Funding would be administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and be used to help fund shelters, counseling and other domestic violence prevention efforts.

“The taxpaying public should not help to finance the operations of a league that on its own is bringing in billions of dollars in revenue and has operated on too many occasions as if it is above the law,” said Senator Weinberg. “The federal government should remove the tax exemption and send the funding to shelters, counseling, and to critical domestic violence prevention programs,

which have seen reductions in their resources as a result of federal cuts. Let's end the special treatment for ultra wealthy sports leagues and dedicate resources to where they're needed most."

Senator Beck, a former rape crisis advocate and volunteer helping women who have suffered domestic violence, called the league's handling of domestic violence cases, including the case involving Rutgers graduate and former Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice, outright unacceptable.

"The NFL attracts millions of women and men of all ages and from all backgrounds. Football, in general, has a place in our homes, whether it is through Pop Warner, college ball or the NFL – we gather with families, friends and colleagues to support our teams and their players. It is uniquely American. Unfortunately, what is being messaged to our boys, men, fans and families by allowing the Commissioner to continue to serve is that domestic violence is a misdemeanor," said Senator Beck. "Today, I call again on Woody Johnson of the Jets and John Mara of the Giants to remove Commissioner Goodell. Roger Goodell became commissioner in September 2006 and in 2007, he enacted a Personal Conduct Policy over which he is the sole judge and jury. During that time, Commissioner Goodell consistently protected dozens of players arrested for domestic violence by issuing no punishment or a one game suspension. Forty eight percent of all NFL player arrests for violent crimes are for domestic violence. It is impossible to imagine that over his seven-year tenure he did not raise that as a serious matter to ownership."

The press conference was also attended by Senators Sandra Bolden Cunningham (D-Hudson), Nia H. Gill (D-Essex), Linda Greenstein (D-Mercer/Middlesex), and M. Teresa Ruiz (D-Essex), as well as Assemblywomen Eliana Pintora Marin (D-Essex), Gabriela Mosquera (D-Gloucester/Camden), Nancy Munoz, (R-Morris, Somerset and Union), Holly Schepisi (D-Bergen/Passaic), Nancy Pinkin (D-Middlesex), Grace Spencer (D-Essex), Annette Quijano (D-Union), and Valerie Vainieri Huttle (D-Bergen).

Joining the legislators in East Rutherford were Jane Shivas, executive director of the New Jersey Coalition for Battered Women, Dr. Sarah McMahon, acting director of Rutgers Center on Violence Against Women and Children, and Elaine Meyerson, executive director of Shelter Our Sisters, a Bergen County-based organization dedicated to helping victims of domestic violence and their children.

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