

Office of the Commissioner
MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL



STATEMENT OF JOE TORRE, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL, BEFORE THE SENATE COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

DECEMBER 2, 2014

Chairman Rockefeller, Senator Thune, and members of the Committee, I am Joe Torre, Executive Vice President of Baseball Operations for Major League Baseball. On behalf of Major League Baseball, I thank you for the opportunity to discuss the efforts that we are undertaking to address the issues of domestic violence and sexual assault.

The subject matter of this hearing is personally important to me. As a person whose childhood was touched by domestic violence, I have come to understand that discussing the issue publicly has the potential to help millions of victims who believe that they must suffer in silence. In 2002, my wife Ali and I formed the “Safe at Home” Foundation to create educational programs aimed at ending the cycle of domestic violence. I consider it one of my proudest accomplishments in my career. Through my work in this area, including co-chairing the Attorney General’s Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, I have had the opportunity to work with some truly outstanding individuals who have devoted their lives to working toward solving the issue of domestic violence in this country.

Commissioner Selig has instilled in our sport the understanding that Major League Baseball is a social institution, and as our national pastime, has an obligation to set a positive example. The Commissioner and I deplore domestic violence and crimes against women and families. We recognize the very clear public expectation for

professional sports leagues to be leaders in addressing this social ill. Some of our Clubs already have taken a leading role in this issue. For example, the Seattle Mariners have partnered with the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence on a state-wide educational initiative called “Refuse to Abuse.”

Going forward, the Commissioner has instructed his staff to develop a stand-alone policy to address domestic violence and sexual assault prior to the 2015 baseball season. Although we are in the midst of developing this policy, I would like to explain to the Committee what we have done thus far and what we hope to do in the next few months.

Since September 2014, as part of our education process, representatives of Major League Baseball have met with over a dozen national and local organizations focused on addressing domestic violence and violence against women, and/or providing services and support to victims. Representatives from those groups consistently told us that while they were obviously unsettled by the recent incidents of domestic violence in professional sports, they believe that those incidents have shined a light on an issue often in the shadows. They believe, and we agree, that sports leagues can make a difference.

We have begun selecting a variety of organizations to serve on a joint MLB-MLBPA steering committee that will develop education and training materials for players, staff and their families. Some of these initiatives include posting informational materials at Major and Minor League ballparks, and publicizing contact information for confidential hotlines and shelters. MLB intends to develop educational programs at each Club specifically designed for the families and intimate partners of players. We also are developing protocols that our Clubs must follow in response to domestic violence or

sexual assault incidents that will include appropriate measures to ensure the safety of affected individuals, providing confidential counseling and treatment for victims, and providing counseling and intervention for perpetrators.

Major League Baseball has selected a San Francisco-based group called Futures Without Violence (“Futures”) to help us develop and implement training and education programs for all of our players. Futures has been partnering with the San Francisco Giants on these important issues for more than a decade. Futures has arranged for Dr. Linda Chamberlain to speak with the medical staffs of our Clubs at MLB’s Winter Meetings in San Diego this coming weekend. Dr. Chamberlain founded the Alaska Family Violence Prevention Project, and will be speaking to our Club medical staffs on a “trauma-informed approach” to addressing domestic violence.

In January 2015, the top prospects in baseball will be educated on domestic violence and sexual assault during MLB’s annual Rookie Career Development Program. Beginning with MLB spring training this February, every Major and Minor League player will be educated on issues relating to domestic violence and sexual assault by Futures, and other organizations including Mentors in Violence Prevention, Men Can Stop Rape, A Call to Men, and Casa De Esperanza. The staffs of MLB Clubs and the Commissioner’s Office also will be educated.

The Commissioner understands that an important component of any policy covering domestic violence and sexual assault is appropriate discipline for players who engage in this conduct. Presently, the Commissioner has the authority under MLB’s collective bargaining agreement with the Players Association to discipline players for

“just cause” for conduct that is materially detrimental or materially prejudicial to the best interests of Baseball including, but not limited to, engaging in conduct in violation of federal, state or local law. Under a “just cause” standard, the Commissioner’s Office is required to prove a violation by a player at an evidentiary hearing before a neutral arbitrator, which can be difficult in the absence of a conviction or plea, or without cooperating witnesses or tangible evidence regarding the conduct. In addition, our arbitrators in the past have been less inclined to uphold severe discipline under a “just cause” standard for off-field conduct that does not impact the player’s ability to perform.

MLB has proposed revisions to its disciplinary policy covering MLB players that would make it easier for the Commissioner to impose an appropriate level of discipline on players who commit acts of domestic violence or sexual assault, and have that discipline be upheld in arbitration. MLB does not have the right to insist on any changes to player discipline until its current collective bargaining agreement with the MLBPA expires in December 2016. However, we are hopeful that we will come to an agreement with the MLBPA prior to the start of next season on a disciplinary policy specifically tailored to domestic violence and sexual assault.

As we told our owners two weeks ago, Major League Baseball is committed to developing a culture in which its athletes implicitly understand their moral obligation as both men and role models to speak out and act against crimes against women and families. We fully understand that educating over 4,000 players from diverse backgrounds on an issue that many of them have not previously considered is not an easy

undertaking. However, we intend to devote the time and the resources necessary to accomplish just that.