

HEARING ON

ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

OF THE

UNITED STATES SENATE

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STATEMENT OF TROY VINCENT

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF FOOTBALL OPERATIONS

FOR THE

NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Troy Vincent, and I am the Executive Vice President for Football Operations at the National Football League. I am pleased to appear here this afternoon to discuss the work we are currently undertaking to address standards of personal conduct, with a particular focus on domestic violence and sexual assault. At the NFL, we want to set the highest goal for personal behavior in order to meet the expectations of our fans, players, and broader public.

Shortly after he became Commissioner in 2007, Commissioner Goodell issued an enhanced Personal Conduct Policy to reinforce the high standards expected of all NFL players, owners, and league employees. But as deeply disturbing recent events made clear, we have not kept our standards current with our own values. We made mistakes, and we have been humbled by this experience. Much of the criticism of the league stems from a fundamental recognition of the NFL's unique place in our society and the opportunity we have to project important values in ways that have a positive impact beyond professional football. We will get this right: we accept the criticism that we have received; and we are committed both to learn and to being part of the solution.

Mr. Chairman, when I consider these issues, I bring perspectives beyond that of an NFL executive.

Domestic violence was a way of life in my home growing up. As young boys, my brother and I watched helplessly numerous times as our mother was beaten, and we called 911 while she lay unconscious. We saw how she struggled to seek help, and find the voice and courage to say "no more." The sense of fear, powerlessness, and all the complexities that accompany this violence remain very real for me today. I have worked for over 20 years as an advocate against domestic violence to try to help keep others from experiencing this pain. So I very much relate to the more than 12 million victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in every community in this nation, amongst every economic class and racial and ethnic group. This is not an issue limited to the NFL, or to professional sports.

In addition, I was privileged myself to play in the National Football League for 15 years. I relate to our current and former players, the vast majority of whom are terrific husbands, fathers, and men who make incredible contributions within their communities. We know that when one player engages in unacceptable conduct, it unfairly casts all of us in the League in the same light. Finally, for 12 years I served as a union officer, and four of those years I was President of the NFL Players Association. I support the interest all players have in a fair process. But I know full well that our players have no tolerance for these incidents, and that they in fact support high standards and enforcement. The players know that standards and integrity are not labor issues or management issues – they are issues that concern everyone in our game.

The 2007 version of the Personal Conduct Policy was developed and implemented by the League in close collaboration with players and their leadership, and it had the strong support of players and the union. I was part of those discussions. Today, the NFL has invited the NFLPA to join us again in setting the highest possible standards in our Personal Conduct Policy and to help us work to prevent this violence going forward.

The NFL is taking a number of steps to improve how we respond to incidents of domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual assault involving our employees and personnel, which I would like to outline for you.

First, the NFL is currently undertaking an intensive and exhaustive review of our Personal Conduct Policy, and we will implement changes soon. Our new Policy is being developed through an effort led personally by the Commissioner. I am a part of this project, as are other League officials and outside advisors with specific expertise in domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual assault, and legal process. Having consulted with over 100 leading experts throughout the country, we are evaluating every aspect of our approach to discipline and accountability for employees and players. Our goal is nothing less than a set of clear rules to govern accountability for misconduct and to establish a fair process for player and employee discipline.

Our challenge, while not unique, is complex. Our policy is broader than what employers typically seek to cover, in the sense that it primarily addresses off the field, or out of workplace, conduct. We have engaged with others who are struggling with a similar task—including law enforcement and educational institutions—to share perspectives and look for best practices on how to prevent personal misconduct and respond when it does occur.

Once the revised policies and procedures are in place, we will create a Conduct Committee of owners who will be responsible for regularly reviewing and recommending changes to the NFL's personal conduct policy going forward, to ensure continual attention and revision when needed. Subject matter experts will continue to advise both the Conduct Committee and the Commissioner and his staff so that going forward we have the right voices at the table on both educational and disciplinary work.

Second, we are deploying a comprehensive and mandatory education program for the more than 5,000 men and women in the NFL family. All league and team personnel—owners, players, coaches, and staff—are currently participating in broad-based domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual assault education, and the sessions are available to and highly encouraged for family members and loved ones. All teams will have participated in these sessions within the next two weeks. Education will continue on an ongoing basis for rookies and returning players, and specialized training for key responders will be rolled out as well.

Our goal is to ensure that everyone understands the full scope of behavior that constitutes domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual assault and is familiar with the warning signs associated with these crimes. We also want to make sure everyone appreciates that they can help prevent this violence. Bystander intervention—how individuals can appropriately and safely help those at risk—is another key focus area of the education. The League also has identified resources that offer prompt and confidential assistance both within the organization and outside in the community to anyone in need.

Third, we are training our existing Critical Response Teams to help prevent and to respond quickly to family violence and sexual assault. When a situation arises, these teams will focus on providing immediate assistance across the board—medical, legal, financial—to anyone in the NFL family, including spouses, significant others, or other family members, who experiences abuse.

Fourth, we are supporting leading domestic violence and sexual assault awareness and prevention groups, including the National Domestic Violence Hotline and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. Our support has allowed these organizations to expand their call volume capacity so that calls for assistance do not go unanswered.

Fifth, we are raising awareness of the critical issues of domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual assault. In collaboration with the NO MORE campaign and the Joyful Heart Foundation, the NFL is airing public Service Announcements during every game broadcast, including a new PSA featuring current and former NFL players. More information can be found at www.nomore.org.

Finally, we are promoting programs that develop the character of young people by developing age-appropriate character development, healthy relationship education as well as dating/domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual assault programming—for those who play, coach, or manage the game in college, high school, and youth football programs. The League recently sent a video to thousands of high school coaches across the nation to encourage them to engage in frank and frequent discussions of family violence and sexual assault with their players. The NFL Foundation will focus on the development of character education programs that will reach youth footballs players, as well as girls and boys, athletes and non-athletes alike.

Mr. Chairman, in the past months, we have learned a great deal by our own mistakes, and by listening to experts in domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual assault—researchers, lawyers and judges, advocates, women’s rights groups, law enforcement, and campus presidents. The more we’ve listened, the more we’ve learned and, in turn, the more aware we are of the complexities of both the problems and the solutions. At the NFL, we are working hard to balance the issues of fair process with the goals of preventing and punishing this behavior. At the end of the day, we believe that wearing the uniform of an NFL player is a privilege, not a right. And every member of the NFL community must embrace the unique leadership role that we play in society and the trust that is placed in us. We look forward to working with the Committee to advance the goals I know we all share.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss this important subject.