

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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Opening Statement of Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney Hearing on “Tackling Toxic Workplaces: Examining the NFL’s Handling of Workplace Misconduct at the Washington Commanders.” June 22, 2022

Good morning, and thank you for being here.

Our hearing today is about protecting women—and all workers—from sexual harassment, intimidation, and bullying in the workplace.

We will be examining one notoriously toxic workplace—the Washington Commanders football team—and the response from the NFL.

During football season, millions of Americans tune in to watch their favorite teams. The NFL and its teams collect tens of billions in revenues—thanks in part to federal benefits.

The NFL and its teams have one of the biggest platforms in America. So what happens in the NFL has consequences for the rest of the country.

The Committee launched an investigation last October after the NFL refused to release the findings of an internal investigation into widespread sexual misconduct at the Washington Commanders.

The Committee requested these findings, but the NFL and the Commanders have refused to produce them, while also withholding more than 40,000 documents collected in their internal review. This lack of transparency suggests that rather than protecting women, the NFL is hoping to sweep this controversy under the rug—just as powerful men like Dan Snyder have done for decades.

Today, we will hear from Roger Goodell, Commissioner of the NFL. I am glad he is participating, and I hope we will finally get more transparency about what the NFL found, and why Mr. Goodell has worked so hard to keep it secret.

We also invited Daniel Snyder to testify today. But rather than show up and take responsibility for his actions, he chose to skip town. Apparently, Mr. Snyder is in France, where he has docked his luxury yacht near a resort town. That should tell you just how much respect he has for women in the workplace.

Mr. Snyder’s absence is all the more telling, given that the Committee released new evidence today that Mr. Snyder himself fostered the Commanders’ toxic workplace. According to former top executives, he fired women—but not men—who engaged in relationships with other employees, while defending male executives accused of sexual harassment. And he kept employees from speaking out through a culture of fear. As one long-time employee described Mr. Snyder’s tactics, “If you don’t obey, intimidate. If you still don’t obey, terminate.” Finally, the employee added, “If that didn’t work, buy off.”

The Committee has also uncovered evidence that Mr. Snyder conducted a shadow investigation to target his

accusers, pin the blame on others, and influence the NFL's own internal review. He filed phony lawsuits to collect private phone records, emails, and text messages. He sent private investigators to former cheerleaders' homes, and he offered hush money to buy their silence.

The NFL was aware of his actions, but failed to stop him. We obtained a secret legal agreement between the NFL and the Commanders that enabled Mr. Snyder to prevent the disclosure of documents and information—including to this Committee.

Some have argued that protecting women isn't worthy of the Committee's time. I strongly disagree. And I'm not alone. In April, six attorneys general condemned the NFL for its ongoing failure to address sexual harassment and gender discrimination across League. The NFL itself has launched new investigations based on evidence brought to light by the Committee.

For more than two decades, Dan Snyder refused to protect the women who worked for him from the toxic culture he created. The NFL has also failed to protect these women. Now, I believe it is up to Congress to protect them, and millions more like them.

I have introduced two bills, along with Committee Members, to do exactly that.

My first bill, the Accountability for Workplace Misconduct Act, will require employers to conduct thorough investigations and share the outcome with victims, and it will prohibit employers from using non-disclosure agreements to conceal workplace misconduct—one of Dan Snyder's favorite tactics.

My second bill is the Professional Images Protection Act. Our investigation confirmed that the Commanders secretly created lewd videos of cheerleaders for the private enjoyment of Dan Snyder. That is despicable, and my bill will create notice and consent requirements for employers who use their employees' professional images.

Let me also assure my colleagues that we can protect workers while also making progress on other important issues. Just this month, our Committee held a crucial hearing on gun violence and advanced legislation to protect LGBTQ rights. And next week we will be holding a bipartisan hearing with President Biden's drug czar on the opioid crisis.

But today, our focus is on protecting women in the workplace, and I believe that issue merits our full attention.

In February, the Committee held a roundtable where we heard directly from several courageous former team employees. Before I yield, I'd like to remind everyone what they said about the harassment they endured, and the need for accountability.

I now yield to my good friend, Ranking Member Comer, for his opening statement.

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