

Press Statement - Title IX Rally

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December 3, 2002

I believe one hundred years from now — assuming that Title IX in its current or expanded form continues to be enforced — historians will view Title IX as one of the most pivotal benchmarks in the progress of women. Title IX created not only opportunity in sports; it also created in girls pride about their bodies, their physicality and their capabilities. Title IX vanquished the notion of the weaker sex.

For these very reasons, I am profoundly worried about the future of Title IX. Make no mistake about it, conservative forces in this country deeply oppose equality for women. Limiting opportunities and reinforcing the notions of inferiority and physical vulnerability are central to their agenda. Eviscerating Title IX is an important means to accomplish these goals.

At the Women's Law Project, we have seen first hand how effective Title IX can be. In the past decade, the WLP has successfully applied Title IX to equalize athletic opportunities and support for women and girls in athletics in three major endeavors.

- In the early 1990's, we represented women athletes and coaches at the University of Pennsylvania in a Title IX complaint filed with the Office for Civil Rights of the Department of Education. We succeeded in obtaining a favorable settlement in which the University agreed to increase its funding for women's sports, hire more full time coaches for women's sports, and provide better facilities for women's teams.
- In 1995, we represented families of girls in Downingtown, Pennsylvania who were not offered a girls' soccer team or softball team in junior high school, though the school sponsored three boys' soccer teams and two baseball teams. We were able to secure soccer teams for girls in junior high school as well as other remarkable improvements for girls in Downingtown area schools.
- By means of federal court litigation, we were able to secure previously denied opportunities for female basketball referees to officiate boys' interscholastic games as well as girls' games.

In addition we have brought litigation under public accommodations laws challenging practices at golf clubs that restrict women's access to tees times, and other archaic rules limiting membership rights of women. Augusta is played out on a daily basis in clubs across the country.

We have provided extensive comments to the Commission on Opportunity in Athletics of the United States Secretary of Education. Our comments included recommendations for strengthening, not weakening, Title IX.

While there have been many successful applications of Title IX, resulting in inspiring increases in athletic opportunities for girls, it is also apparent that the fight is far from over. In Pennsylvania today, for example, few NCAA Division I schools even approach proportionality for athletic opportunities for young women. Shocking disparities in participation, enrollment, and budget allocation rates remain among the Division I colleges and universities in Pennsylvania.

There can be no doubt that hostility to girls' and women's participation in athletics is deeply ingrained among very powerful and influential forces in this country. It is critical to understand that opposition to Title IX is not about sports; it is about control. Powerful women are not part of the conservative agenda.

The goal of Title IX is simple. It's called fairness. Girls deserve the same opportunity to succeed that boys have. Our job is to make sure that they get that opportunity. Their future, and the role of women in the future, depends on it.

The Women's Law Project is a public interest law center which has fought for legal and economic equality for women and their families since 1974.