

Women's Law Project

For Immediate Release
Media Contact:

November 25, 2008
Susan Frietsche, 412-227-0301
412-302-0059 (cell)

Women's Law Project Applauds Pittsburgh Public Schools for Authorizing Gender Equity Review of High School Athletics

PITTSBURGH— Calling it “a model of progressive leadership that should make every Pittsburgh resident proud,” Women's Law Project Senior Staff Attorney Susan Frietsche praised the Pittsburgh School Board for authorizing a comprehensive audit of Pittsburgh high school athletics to ensure that the district is in compliance with Title IX, the federal law requiring gender equity in federally funded educational programs.

The Law Project singled out the school board's solicitor's office and Pittsburgh Public School Board Director Heather Arnet for special thanks for propelling the issue onto the school board's agenda. Arnet, who represents District 2, commented, “We are so grateful to the courageous parents and students who have brought these inequities to our attention and to the Women's Law Project for working with the Board to develop a systemic solution to ensure that all students in our district have the opportunity to enjoy and experience athletic excellence fairly and fully.”

Tonight's vote by the school board came in response to the Women's Law Project's complaints of pervasive and severe gender inequities in Pittsburgh schools' athletics programs. The school-by-school review of the district's high school sports programs will focus on the availability of equal opportunities for female athletes to participate in competitive sports and on the treatment that female athletes receive in matters including athletic facilities, fields, equipment, uniforms, scheduling, publicity, coaching, and travel.

Enacted in 1972, Title IX of the Education Amendments opened sports to women in ways unimaginable before. Prior to the enactment of Title IX, only one in 27 girls played varsity high school sports. By 2001, that figure was up to one in 2.5, for a total of 2.8 million girls participating in high school athletics nationwide.

“The benefits of participating in athletics are nothing short of amazing,” noted Tatyana Margolin, Women's Law Project staff attorney. “Student athletes are less likely to abuse alcohol and drugs or have an eating disorder or an unwanted pregnancy, and they're more likely to graduate and go to college. We have to stop withholding these benefits from our young women.”

A 2001 investigative series by the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* found that only 33% of high school athletes in southwestern Pennsylvania are girls and that some area schools showed disparities in athletic opportunities for girls as high as 28%. The series also uncovered unequal treatment of female student-athletes in facilities, coaching, operating budgets, and other areas.

“By identifying where the district is shortchanging its female students and taking pre-emptive action to correct any unfairness, Pittsburgh may be avoiding extremely costly and time-consuming litigation or burdensome oversight by the federal Department of Education,” commented Ms. Frietsche. “It's the smart thing to do, and it's also the right thing to do. We love

our daughters as much as we love our sons. Our daughters deserve to share equally in every advantage.”

The Women’s Law Project is a non-profit women’s legal advocacy organization with offices in downtown Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. In 2006, the Women’s Law Project brought a successful federal class action on behalf of female athletes at Slippery Rock University, after several teams were cut in violation of Title IX.

###