



The Legal Aid Society  
EMPLOYMENT LAW CENTER

**For Immediate Release**

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**FEMALE ATHLETES FILE CLASS ACTION DISCRIMINATION LAWSUIT  
AGAINST SWEETWATER UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**Case also alleges District retaliated against students for lodging complaints  
about unequal treatment and Title IX violations**

(SAN DIEGO, CA) -- A group of female athletes at Castle Park High School today filed a class-action lawsuit against the Sweetwater Union High School District and several officials, including the school principal. The suit alleges that the high school unfairly favors boys' sports over girls' sports by giving the boys better athletic facilities, resources and opportunities.

"The school treats us like we are inferior to the boys," said Naudia Rangel, a senior softball player at Castle Park High School. "The boys' baseball field is in great shape and we are not allowed on it. All we want is to play on fields of the same quality and have the same equipment the boys get automatically."

The students are suing for injunctive relief under Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments, which bars sex discrimination in education, including athletic programs. They demand that the school officials immediately implement an affirmative plan to remedy the disparities.

The boys' football and baseball teams are given superior playing and practice facilities have dedicated locker rooms for just the football team and have access to the best athletic amenities. Female athletes are denied the use of the boys' playing fields and the two best batting cages. The girls must practice and play in facilities that are overused, rundown and, in the case of the softball field, barely maintained and missing proper bleachers and a complete dugout.

Instead of addressing the stark discrepancy between the girls and boys facilities, the Sweetwater Union High School District further discriminated against female athletes.

Approximately \$500,000 was spent to construct and maintain a roller hockey rink for the boys' team, even while the school refused to provide equitable athletic facilities or access to the superior facilities to the existing girls' teams.

When parents and students complained about Title IX violations, Castle Park High School made minor cosmetic changes to the softball field but refused to allow the girls to use the boys' facilities or to improve the girls' facilities to make them comparable to the boys'. The administration retaliated against the girls by firing their highly qualified and beloved coach and refusing to allow qualified parents to assist the new coach, despite the fact the football team was still allowed to have parent coaches.

“The discriminatory practices of Castle Park High have been further compounded by the egregious retaliation against the students,” said Vicky Barker, Legal Director of the Californian Women’s Law Center. “Banning qualified parents who have significantly invested in the education and development of the team as a whole is short-sighted and potentially damaging to the girls’ future.”

“Castle Park High’s failure to provide these girls the same benefits given to the boys is appalling,” said Elizabeth Kristen, Director of the Title IX K-12 Equality Project at the Legal Aid Society-Employment Law Center in San Francisco. “The school knew it was in serious violation of Title IX, and yet made minimal, substandard updates to the girls’ facilities. We will not be satisfied until the administration respects the rights to which the girls are entitled under the law – athletic facilities and opportunities equal to those of the boys’ sports teams.”

This summer marks the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Title IX, the landmark legislation that bans sex discrimination in schools, whether in academics or athletics. Although Title IX cases filed on the college level are highly publicized, discrimination is just as likely to occur at the K-12 level. Discrimination in elementary and high schools often goes unchecked because younger athletes and their parents may not be aware that anti-discrimination laws apply to public educational institutions as well as most private educational institutions if they receive federal funding. Each school system is required to implement and enforce Title IX. Sweetwater and other school districts that are not in compliance or ignore persistent complaints of noncompliance by students, parents, and coaches can be sued and, upon further investigation, could lose all federal funding.

High school girls who participate in team sports are less likely to drop out of school, smoke, drink, or become pregnant, and are more likely to go on to college. The skills gained from sports participation including teamwork, leadership, and discipline, are crucial as women progress in the corporate world at higher levels than ever before. Eighty-percent of female managers of Fortune 500 companies have played organized sports on some level.

The students are represented by Vicky Barker and Cacilia Kim of the California Women’s Law Center in Los Angeles and Patricia A. Shiu and Elizabeth Kristen of the

Legal Aid Society- Employment Law Center in San Francisco. The suit was filed in San Diego Federal District Court.

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*Since its founding in 1989, the California Women's Law Center has worked in collaboration with others to defend, secure and advance the comprehensive civil rights of women and girls. CWLC has unparalleled expertise in strategies to protect women's rights with programs to empower individuals to use the law to address the societal and legal issues that perpetuate ongoing gender inequity, women's health issues, reproductive justice and violence against women.*

*The Legal Aid Society of San Francisco-Employment Law Center, founded in 1916, is the oldest legal aid organization in the West. It is committed to protecting the rights and economic self-sufficiency of low-income and disadvantaged workers and their families throughout the Bay Area, California, and nationwide. The LAS-ELC provides a continuum of assistance, including community legal services, educational materials, technical assistance to other groups, and direct legal representation. It is nationally recognized for its legal advocacy programs that address racial equality; gender equity; immigration and national origin, and disability rights.*