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Statement Of Security On Campus, Inc. Representative Jennifer Mercurio Urging Congressional Action Against Epidemic Of Collegiate Athlete Violence

New York, N.Y.-Good morning. I'm Jennifer Mercurio here representing Security On Campus, Inc. a non-profit victims' rights organization.

SOC, the only national organization devoted exclusively to serving the victims of violent crime on our nation's college and university campuses, has dealt with many cases involving violent student athletes. All too often a star athlete is allowed to continue competing for their school while their victim, especially in rape cases, has their life thrown into chaos and often has to leave school.

In one case Penn State University allowed a football player expelled for sexually assaulting a fellow student to actually play in the Capital One Bowl on New Year's Day in 2003, even though he'd been expelled weeks earlier. In another sexual assault case Notre Dame would have allowed one of their former football players who'd been permanently banned from the campus to return as a member of a rival football team if not for the intervention of his accuser who was supported in her efforts by SOC and the National Coalition Against Violent Athletes.

To date the NCAA has turned a blind eye to the victims of violent student athletes, leaving decisions about whether their assailants play or not up to individual schools. And as we all know collegiate football and basketball are extremely competitive sports, with millions of dollars at stake for the schools involved. All too often a victim is on the losing side of that equation, told that justice is less important than the school winning a game.

This is an unacceptable situation, and today we join the National Coalition Against Violent Athletes in calling on Congress to require the NCAA to adopt an effective anti-violence policy for student athletes and to explore the NCAA's finances. With a clear national standard victims will finally be given the justice they are due, and schools that might have been afraid to strongly discipline their athletes but feared being put at a competitive disadvantage will know they are on an even playing field.

Athletes should be held to a higher standard as public representatives of their schools, not given a pass for outrageous conduct. When an NCAA student athlete is accused of any violent crime they should immediately be suspended from competition until a school hearing, a common means used by colleges to discipline their students, can determine whether or not they are responsible. If they are found to be responsible, and or are convicted in criminal court, they should never play again at that school or any other NCAA school. Then we will finally begin to erode the epidemic of violent athletes.

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