

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 7, 2018

706 HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

(202) 224-2823  
FAX: (202) 224-9673

90 STATE HOUSE SQUARE, TENTH FLOOR  
HARTFORD, CT 06103  
(860) 258-6940  
FAX: (860) 258-6958

915 LAFAYETTE BOULEVARD, SUITE 304  
BRIDGEPORT, CT 06604  
(203) 330-0598  
FAX: (203) 330-0608

<http://blumenthal.senate.gov>

Mr. Roger Goodell  
Commissioner  
National Football League  
345 Park Avenue  
New York, New York 10154

Dear Mr. Goodell,

I write to condemn the recently publicized and deeply disturbing acts of domestic violence committed by a number of players in the National Football League<sup>1</sup> (NFL or the League), as well as the inadequate response by the NFL in handling these egregious breaches in conduct. In cases of violence involving both Kareem Hunt and Reuben Foster, the NFL and its teams seems to have bungled serious domestic violence cases with hapless investigations and mediocre punishments, calling into question any previous commitment to combatting a culture of domestic violence within the League. Despite the NFL's apparent efforts regarding education and engagement, it has become clear that the NFL has continued to inadequately investigate and ineffectively discipline players accused of domestic violence and assault. I therefore ask that the NFL provide more information regarding its handling of these cases, and provide an update on the status of its fight against domestic violence and sexual assault in the League.

On February 10, 2018, Cleveland police responded to a physical altercation between Kansas City Chiefs (Chiefs) player Kareem Hunt and a nineteen-year-old woman in a Cleveland hotel. According to the police report, Hunt "shoved and pushed" the woman.<sup>2</sup> While NFL security and the Kansas City Chiefs questioned Hunt after the incident, no further action was taken to punish Hunt for his clear violation of the NFL Personal Conduct Policy<sup>3</sup> – that is, until the upsetting video of the brutal confrontation was published by TMZ last week, nearly ten months later. Hours after this video emerged, the NFL suspended Hunt, and the Kansas City Chiefs fired him.

While the NFL and the Chiefs initially received praise for such "swift" action, it now is evident that the NFL and the Chiefs only enforced the League's supposed zero-tolerance for domestic violence when it became apparent that they could no longer sweep the incident under the rug. At minimum, there should be an investigatory body operating independent of the NFL and the owners that is empowered to take complaints of domestic violence and thorough review them. The NFL may need to rely on video replay to determine whether a catch is a catch, but it should not need video replay to take domestic violence seriously.

---

<sup>1</sup> Steve Vockrodt, "NFL didn't formally seek records until Kareem Hunt video published; Chiefs never did," *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, Missouri), December. 4, 2018

<sup>2</sup> Blair Kerkhoff, "Woman says Chiefs' Kareem Hunt shoved her, another police report lists her as a suspect," *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, Missouri), February. 12, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> National Football League, *Personal Conduct Policy*, (2016), 1-2,  
<https://static.nfl.com/static/content/public/photo/2017/08/11/0ap3000000828506.pdf>

I am profoundly disturbed by a number of reports that the NFL did not formally submit a public records request to the City of Cleveland for information related to the February 2018 incident until last week – Friday, November 30, 2018 – the same day that the video surveillance of the Hunt assault became public. While the NFL did retrieve a report from the Cleveland Police Department in February 2018, it sought the report through unofficial, nonpublic channels. This seems to further underscore the NFL’s apparent penchant for secrecy and confirmation bias to protect players while investigating and resolving matters of domestic violence and sexual assault.

This week, additional videos were released depicting Hunt involved in two more violent physical altercations prior to the February 2018 incident. In these instances, as well, it appears the NFL and an NFL team for whom Hunt played failed to sufficiently investigate and appropriately punish a player’s clear and alarming pattern of violence. According to the NFL Personal Conduct Policy, at the bare minimum, members of the League must “refrain from conduct detrimental to the integrity and public confidence in the NFL.” While the police report from the incident should have been enough evidence to warrant an investigation by the team, and should qualify as a violation of the league personal conduct policy, it still took the emergence of a graphic video for the League and its teams to believe a survivor of domestic abuse and take action.

Firing Kareem Hunt was no act of bravery by the Kansas City Chiefs. In fact, the Chiefs still employ Tyreek Hill, a player kicked off the Oklahoma State football team following charges that he attacked his pregnant girlfriend. The Kansas City Chiefs are not alone in perpetuating a culture of apparent acceptance of domestic violence. Just last year, at least six new players facing outstanding court cases based on alleged physical or sexual assaults joined the League.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in the past week, the Washington Redskins acquired Reuben Foster – a player cut by the San Francisco 49ers shortly after his second domestic violence arrest in less than a year.

Washington management reported that the team had “gathered its own information” on the Foster case – where he is accused of attacking his ex-girlfriend on November 24, 2018 in a Tampa hotel – and had “become comfortable that they had heard a side of the Foster story that is different.”<sup>5</sup> In reality, the team’s so-called investigation did not even include contacting the Tampa police for information.<sup>6</sup> Reuben Foster’s case indicates that many organizations within the NFL still operate with a stunningly obtuse and craven moral calculus – win at all costs – and refuse to investigate claims against players. Domestic abusers and bad actors in the League are passed around from team to team, sending a clear message that the League still values on-field performance and prowess more than discouraging criminal behavior committed by a player – including assaulting women. The NFL and its teams’ failure to use all investigative tools at their disposal, overreliance on their own backchannels with law enforcement in conducting internal player conduct violations,<sup>7</sup> and proclivity to secrecy all belie the league’s supposed commitment to a robust zero-tolerance policy against domestic violence and sexual assault. In the years since the league took action to reform

---

<sup>4</sup> Deborah Epstein, “I’m done helping the NFL Players Association pay lip service to domestic violence prevention,” *Washington Post* (Washington, District of Columbia), June. 5, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> John Keim, “Bruce Allen: Redskins’ investigation of Reuben Foster found ‘a side of the story that is different,’” ESPN (Bristol, Connecticut), December. 3, 2018 [http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/\\_/id/25446164/bruce-allen-redskins-investigation-reuben-foster-found-side-story-different](http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/25446164/bruce-allen-redskins-investigation-reuben-foster-found-side-story-different)

<sup>6</sup> Will Hobson, “Redskins’ investigation into Reuben Foster did not include contacting police,” *Washington Post* (Washington, District of Columbia), December. 4, 2018

<sup>7</sup> National Football League, *Report to the National Football League of an Independent Investigation into the Ray Rice Incident*, Robert S. Mueller III (WilmerHale, 2015), 52-53  
<http://static.nfl.com/static/content/public/photo/2015/01/08/0ap3000000455484.pdf> pages 52-53

policies related to domestic violence, these alarming reports raise the question whether anything has changed.

Any progress the League made with its new personal conduct policy and domestic violence education seems to have fallen on deaf ears of NFL owners and front office personnel, who only take action when they are in the spotlight. Instead of implementing expert suggestions for dealing with family violence, the NFL has hid investigative reports about violence against women within the league under non-disclosure agreements.<sup>8</sup> The NFL must make these recommendations public, and take serious and immediate steps to implement these reforms in order to gain back the trust of the public.

The NFL and its member teams still enjoy many unique benefits, such as the federal antitrust exemption. As such, I fully believe the NFL has a responsibility to the public to ensure that the athletes, particularly those with ongoing investigations into domestic violence allegations, are held to a credible standard for off-the-field conduct. It is also vital that the NFL apply the League's Personal Conduct Policy to recently drafted players, applying the same standard to draft picks with outstanding legal proceedings regarding domestic violence or sexual assault, to prevent any further bad actors from joining the league. I ask that the NFL strongly enforce its new policies and consider sanctions on owners who draft players with known personal conduct issues, but who fail to enforce team and league rules for such players.

These cases and others raise questions as to whether the NFL is truly committed to addressing the scourge of domestic violence, and whether the NFL and team owners have the effective leadership necessary to make much needed change. Until team owners stop prioritizing and enabling abusers over survivors, the NFL will have an insurmountable credibility gap.

At this time, I request that you immediately provide more information on your investigation of the Kareem Hunt case. I also request a detailed timeline of how the NFL plans to meet its existing commitments and any additional measures it plans to take to address the scourge of domestic violence and sexual assault. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this request.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senator

---

<sup>8</sup> Deborah Epstein, "I'm done helping the NFL Players Association pay lip service to domestic violence prevention," *Washington Post* (Washington, District of Columbia), June. 5, 2018.