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ADMINISTRATIVE CLASS COMPLAINT

COMPLAINANT

Champion Women

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RECIPIENT

Mississippi University for Women Jennifer Claybrook, Director of Athletics 1100 College Street Columbus, MS 39701

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I. PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

- 1. This complaint is filed by *Champion Women*, pursuant to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. § 1681 *et seq.* ("Title IX") and the regulations and policies promulgated thereunder. *See* 34 C.F.R. § 106 *et seq.* Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in federally funded education programs and activities, including athletics.
- 2. Champion Women is a 501(c)(3) that provides legal advocacy for girls and women in sports.
- 3. As detailed in the Factual and Legal Allegations below, data submitted by Mississippi University for Women, ("Mississippi for Women") to the Office of Postsecondary Education of the U.S. Department of Education pursuant to the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act ("EADA"), 20 U.S.C. § 1092, as well as information collected from Mississippi for Women's website indicates that Mississippi for Women is discriminating on the basis of sex by providing women with unequal athletic participation opportunities, unequal athletic scholarship dollars, and unequal treatment and benefits, including athletic recruitment funding.
- 4. In order to address these disparities, *Champion Women* requests that the Office for Civil Rights ("OCR") investigate Mississippi for Women and to determine whether it is providing women equal opportunities to participate in varsity sports, equal opportunities to earn athletic scholarships, and equivalent treatment and benefits, including recruitment funding as required by Title IX and, if not, to remedy any unlawful conduct.

II. JURISDICTION

- 5. The OCR is responsible for ensuring compliance with Title IX and receiving information about, investigating, and remedying violations of Title IX and its implementing regulations and guidelines. 34 C.F.R. §§ 106.71, 100.7.
- 6. *Champion Women* has not filed this complaint with any other agency or institution.
- 7. As Mississippi for Women currently violates Title IX's athletic equity requirements, this complaint is timely.

III. FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

- 8. Mississippi for Women receives federal financial assistance and is therefore prohibited from discriminating on the basis of sex pursuant to Title IX.
- 9. Data submitted by Mississippi for Women to the U.S. Department of Education pursuant to the EADA that is publicly available on the Office of Postsecondary Education

website for academic years 2003-04 through 2021-2022 indicates that Mississippi for Women is not currently and has not in the past been providing female athletes equal opportunities to participate in athletics under Title IX's three-part participation test.

- 10. Champion Women has edited the EADA data on our website https://titleixschools.com/ in just one instance: to remove male practice players who are counted up in the tally as "women". These male practice players are not female athletes and have therefore been subtracted from the totals in the EADA.
- 11. Mississippi for Women does not and has not provided athletic opportunities to female students in numbers substantially proportionate to their enrollment pursuant to part one of the Title IX participation test. Women are 81.25% of the student body, but just 49.81% of the student-athletes.

	Undergraduate Enrollment						Athletic Participation		
Year	Men	Women	Total	Percent Women	Men	Women Prong 2: This # should Rise Continuousl y and Steadily Over Time, Without Going Backwards	Total	Percent Women	Female Athletes Who Would Need to be Added to Achieve
2017-18	371	1740	2111	82.43%	69	49	118	41.53%	275
2018-19	367	1634	2001	81.66%	97	92	189	48.68%	340
2019-20	359	1666	2025	82.27%	120	110	230	47.83%	447
2020-21	334	1485	1819	81.64%	97	101	198	51.01%	330
2021-22	305	1322	1627	81.25%	129	128	257	49.81%	431

- 12. In 2021-2022, the most recent academic year for which EADA data is available that is not corrupted by disruptions related to Covid-19, Mississippi for Women's participation gap was 431 athletes. In other words, Mississippi for Women must add 431 additional athletic opportunities for women in order to provide athletic opportunities substantially proportionate to enrollment. To put this into context, 431 additional opportunities is enough to add three more athletic departments; Mississippi for Women currently only has 113 women athletes.
- 13. The EADA data and evidence gathered on Mississippi for Women's website show that Mississippi for Women does not have a history and continuing practice of expanding athletic participation opportunities for women pursuant to Prong 2 of the Title IX participation test. In

¹ See *Champion Women* website for every college and university receiving federal funds: https://titleixschools.com/2023/05/20/eada-data/ High school data for these schools receiving federal funds is available here: https://titleixschools.com/2023/06/06/check-your-high-school/

2003, University of Mississippi for Women cut its entire women's athletic department, and just started it back in 2017- 2018.²

- 14. Mississippi for Women sponsors 7 varsity teams for men: baseball, basketball, cross country, golf, soccer, tennis, and track & field, serving 110 men. It sponsors 8 varsity sports for women, including basketball, cross country, golf, soccer, softball, tennis, track & field, and volleyball, serving 113 women.
- 15. Information available on Mississippi for Women's website suggests that the university is not accommodating the interests and abilities of female athletes as required by part three of the Title IX participation test. Mississippi for Women's Intramurals webpage only has men on three pictures on the home page.³
- 16. Sport Governing Bodies and the NCAA, for member schools, make it very easy to see where other competitors are located. The NCAA publishes the "NCAA Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report, 1956 2022" for schools to find competitors within the school's normal competitive region: NCAA Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report.⁴
- 17. Mississippi for Women is an NCAA Division III school; it is a member of the St. Louis Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, which covers a wide geographic region, including Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, Mississippi, and Arkansas. Affiliate members are in Iowa.

 $https://www.imleagues.com/spa/intramural/7e085de4f8dc4719b9d6bf893d6e7819/home\#google_vignette\\See$

https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/research/sportpart/2022RES SportsSponsorshipParticipationRatesReport.pdf See individual sports' governing bodies for more, e.g.,

Women's College Rugby: https://www.urugby.com/teams/womens-teams

 $Collegiate \ Equestrian: \ \underline{https://collegiateequestrian.com/sports/2020/5/6/schools.aspx}$

Women's Collegiate Wrestling: https://wrestlelikeagirl.org/college-opportunities

Collegiate Competitive Cheer Teams: https://www.ncsasports.org/cheerleading/colleges (not to be confused with sideline cheerleading)

Women's Collegiate Triathlon: https://www.usatriathlon.org/multisport/ncaa-triathlon

Collegiate Sailing is governed by the Inter-Collegiate Sailing Association (ICSA) with 220 schools: https://www.collegesailing.org/about/overview

Women's Collegiate Ice Hockey: https://www.uscho.com/teams/#d1women

Collegiate Field Hockey: https://www.teamusa.org/USA-Field-Hockey/PLAYERS/College/Team-Websites Collegiate Synchronized/ Artistic Swimming: https://www.collegexpress.com/lists/list/colleges-with-notable-synchronized-swimming-teams/581/

Collegiate Bowling - https://collegebowling.bowl.com/teams

Collegiate Rifle - https://competitions.nra.org/competitions/nra-national-matches/collegiate-championships/collegiate-shooting-sports-directory/

Collegiate Skiing – https://www.uscsa.org/

Collegiate Water Polo - https://collegiatewaterpolo.org/

Collegiate Women's Gymnastics https://www.ncaa.com/sports/gymnastics-women

 $^{^2}$ Challenges and Grit: a brief history of athletics at the W: https://web1.muw.edu/visions/features/4957-challenges-grit-a-brief-history-of-athletics-at-the-w

³ See men:

Mississippi for Women will be able to pick from many collegiate competitors in this big geographic region.

- 18. The St. Louis Intercollegiate Athletic Conference sponsors women's Wrestling as a Championship sport, and Mississippi University for Women does not sponsor women's Wrestling. Championship sports are unique educational experiences. They demonstrate women's interest in these sports and that competition for these women's sports exists in Mississippi University for Women's competitive geographic area.
- 19. Mississippi University for Women is also a member of United States Collegiate Athletic Association (USCAA).
- 20. High school-age girls in Mississippi compete in a number of sports not offered by Mississippi for Women. https://www.nfhsnetwork.com/states/MS

Mississippi high school female athletes are provided very few college sports opportunities. According to the NCAA,⁵ in 2020, only 1.7% of high school girls basketball players were provided the opportunity to play in Division III. Just 5.8% of high school Field Hockey players, 2.1% of Golfers, 16.2% of Ice Hockey players, 6.2% of Lacrosse players, 2.9% of Soccer players, 2.2% of Softball players, 3% of Swimmers, 2% of Tennis players, 1.9% of Track & Field athletes, 1.6% of Volleyball players, 1.2% of Water Polo players in high school are provided opportunities to play their sport in Division III.

These metrics demonstrate the enormous demand for women to compete in collegiate sports that is unmet. Girls and women have the interest and athletic ability to play additional sports. It cannot be said that there are not women interested and athletically able to compete in many additional sports at Mississippi Women.

In addition, high school-age girls in competitive geographic region are active in club sports or travel teams that are not associated with their school, such as Basketball, Soccer, Golf, Tennis, and Track & Field, Wrestling, Badminton, Table Tennis, Team Handball, Sailing, Field Hockey, Fencing, Swimming & Diving, Skateboarding, Water Polo, Archery, Field Hockey, Rifle, Triathlon, Ice Hockey, Sport Climbing, Artistic Swimming, Skiing, Snowboarding, Gymnastics, Rowing, Wrestling, Rugby, and all sorts of combat sports, like Judo, Karate, and Taekwondo, to name a few.

These metrics demonstrate that women have expressed enormous demand to compete in sports that is unmet. Girls and women have the interest and athletic ability to play additional sports. It cannot be said that there are not women interested and athletically able to compete in many additional sports at the Mississippi University for Women.

21. Rugby, Equestrian, Triathlon, and Wrestling are NCAA emerging sports. There are 163 college women's Wrestling programs, 42 NCAA schools sponsor Triathlon, 26 colleges

⁵ NCAA: Estimated Probability of Competing in College Athletics:

https://www.ncaa.org/sports/2015/3/2/estimated-probability-of-competing-in-college-athletics.aspx

Champion Women, Sex Discrimination in Athletics in Violation of Title IX, 2023

sponsor women's varsity Equestrian, and at least 32 colleges currently sponsor women's varsity Rugby.

- 22. A review of the Mississippi for Women website does not reveal that the school undertook any athletic interest surveys or other research into interest and competition to support the addition of women's varsity sports. While surveys are never sufficient to deny women sports opportunities, they are often helpful in determining *which sports* the school should add.
- 23. Mississippi for Women's EADA data further indicates that the university provides inadequate and unequal funding for the recruitment of female athletes. In 2021-2022, Mississippi for Women spent almost equal amounts between men and women, but if women received the same percentage as is reflected in enrollment, 81.25%, women would have received \$31,361 more. Men are only 18% of the student body.
- 24. If, for some reason, the OCR determines that Mississippi for Women is, in fact, not discriminating against women in providing opportunities in sport, Mississippi for Women would still need to provide its women's sports teams and women's coaches with \$173 more recruiting dollars in order to be consistent with the school's investment in men's sports.

IV. LEGAL ALLEGATIONS

- 25. Title IX provides that "[n]o person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." 20 U.S.C. §1681(a).
- 26. Title IX regulations prohibit athletic programs from discriminating on the basis of sex in interscholastic, intercollegiate, club or intramural athletics offered by the institution. 34 C.F.R. §106.41(a) (2000).
- 27. Title IX regulations require institutions that offer athletics programs to provide equal athletic opportunities to members of both sexes to participate in athletics. 34 C.F.R. §106.41(c)(1).
- 28. Pursuant to the 1979 Title IX Policy Interpretation, compliance with Title IX's equal athletic participation requirement is measured by determining whether the educational institution meets one part of the following three-part test:
 - 1. Prong 1: Whether intercollegiate level participation opportunities for male and female students are provided in numbers substantially proportionate to their respective enrollments; or
 - 2. Prong 2: Where the members of one sex have been and are underrepresented among intercollegiate athletes, whether the

institution can show a history and continuing practice of program expansion which is demonstrably responsive to the developing interests and abilities of the members of that sex; or

3. Prong 3: Where the members of one sex are underrepresented among intercollegiate athletes, and the institution cannot show a history and continuing practice of program expansion, as described above, whether it can be demonstrated that the interests and abilities of the members of that sex have been fully and effectively accommodated by the present program.

United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office for Civil Rights, *Policy Interpretation; Title IX and Intercollegiate Athletics*, 44 Fed. Reg. 71413 (Dec. 11, 1979) [hereinafter *Policy Interpretation*].

- 29. In determining substantial proportionality under part one of the three-part test, OCR considers the number of opportunities that would have to be added to achieve proportionality and whether it would be sufficient to support another team. If there are a significant number of unaccommodated women, it is likely that a viable sport could be added and therefore the institution has not satisfied part one of the three-part test. United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *Clarification of Intercollegiate Athletics Policy Guidance: the Three-Part Test* (Jan. 16, 1996) [hereinafter *1996 Clarification*].
- 30. In 1975, schools were given three years to be in compliance with the equal participation mandate under Title IX. Schools had only one year to end sex-discrimination in all other areas of Title IX's non-discrimination mandate. Only athletics gave schools three years to add athletic opportunities and to stop discriminating against women or until 1978. That deadline passed 45 years ago. 34 C.F.R. §106.41(d).

It is worth noting how odd Prong 2 is as a legal test, in comparison to other non-discrimination civil rights. For a school to be able to argue that it is still playing catch-up with non-discrimination – exists nowhere else in law. This is especially true 51 years after the passage of Title IX, and 48 years after the passage of the regulations OCR depends on, regulations that were passed by Congress. When a school uses Prong 2, it is admitting that it is not providing women with equal educational opportunities, but that their actions are acceptable, because the school is "improving." Title IX's Prong 2 allows schools to provide girls and women with less.

31. Therefore, it is understandable that Prong 2 is a strict legal test. In determining whether an institution has a history and continuing practice of expansion under Prong 2 of the three-part test, OCR reviews the entire history of the athletic program and evaluates whether the

⁶ 34 C.F.R. §106.41(d) "Adjustment period. A recipient which operates or sponsors interscholastic, intercollegiate, club or intramural athletics at the elementary school level shall comply fully with this section as expeditiously as possible but in no event later than one year from the effective date of this regulation. A recipient which operates or sponsors interscholastic, intercollegiate, club or intramural athletics at the secondary or post-secondary school level shall comply fully with this section as expeditiously as possible but in no event later than three years from the effective date of this regulation."

institution has expanded participation opportunities for the underrepresented sex in a manner that was demonstrably responsive to their developing interests and abilities, considering a number of factors, including:

- an institution's record of adding intercollegiate teams, or upgrading teams to intercollegiate status, for the underrepresented sex;
- an institution's record of increasing the numbers of participants in intercollegiate athletics who are members of the underrepresented sex;
- an institution's affirmative responses to requests by students or others for addition or elevation of sports; and
- whether the institution has effective ongoing procedures for collecting, maintaining and analyzing information on the interest and abilities of students of the underrepresented sex, including monitoring athletic participation, and assessing interest and ability on a periodic basis.

United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *Intercollegiate Athletics Policy Clarification: The Three-Part Test- Part Three* (Apr. 20, 2010) [hereinafter 2010 Clarification]; 1996 Clarification.

- 32. In determining whether an institution has a continuing practice of program expansion under Prong 2, OCR will consider a number of factors, including:
 - an institution's current implementation of a nondiscriminatory policy or procedure for requesting the addition of sports (including the elevation of club or intramural teams) and the effective communication of the policy or procedure to students;
 - an institution's current implementation of a plan of program expansion that is responsive to developing interests and abilities; and
 - an institution's efforts to monitor developing interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex, for example, by conducting periodic nondiscriminatory assessments of developing interests and abilities and taking timely actions in response to the results.

2010 Clarification, 1996 Clarification.

- 33. OCR will not find a history and continuing practice of program expansion where an institution increases the proportional participation opportunities for the underrepresented sex by reducing opportunities for the overrepresented sex alone or by reducing participation opportunities for the overrepresented sex to a proportionately greater degree than for the underrepresented sex. 2010 Clarification, 1996 Clarification.
- 34. Courts have found that schools must have both a history *and* continuing practice of expanding opportunities for women for Prong 2 compliance. *Mansourian v. Bd. Of Regents of Univ. of Cal.*, 594 F. 3d 1095, 1108. (9th Cir. Cal. 2010).

- 35. Prong 3 of the three-part test requires an examination of whether there is an unmet interest in a particular sport, a sufficient ability to sustain a team in the sport, and a reasonable expectation for competition for a team in the sport. 2010 Clarification, 1996 Clarification.
- 36. Whether there is unmet interest and ability will be determined by examining a broad range of indicators, including whether the institution uses nondiscriminatory methods of assessing interest and ability, the elimination of a viable team for the unrepresented sex, multiple indicators of interest and ability, and frequency of conducting assessments. 2010 Clarification.
- 37. Sufficient interest can be established by student requests to add a sport or elevate a club sport, increases in club or intramural sport participation, responses to interviews and interest surveys, assessments of student athletic participation before entering the institution or in the secondary schools from which the university draws its students, and assessments of participation in intercollegiate sports in the institution's normal competitive regions. *Id.*
- 38. Ability may be established by the athletic accomplishments and competitive experience of club sports and admitted students, the opinions of coaches, administrators, and athletes, and student participation in other sports. *Id*.
- 39. Expectation of competition may be established through athletic opportunities offered by other schools with which the school competes or opportunities at other schools in the school's geographic area, including those against which the institution does not compete. *Id.*
- 40. Under Prong 3 of the three-part test, OCR will also examine an institution's recruitment practices. If an institution recruits potential student-athletes for its men's teams, OCR will examine whether the institution is providing women's teams with substantially equal opportunities to recruit potential student athletes. *Id*.
- 41. Title IX also requires schools to provide equal scholarship dollars, in proportion to the number of students of each sex participating in athletics. 34 C.F.R. §106.37(c) (2000). NCAA limits on scholarships per team is not a legal defense; schools cannot blame a third-party for sex discrimination; recipients are responsible for equality. Schools choose which sports to sponsor, and some schools have chosen scholarship-dense sports for men, such as football and basketball, and scholarship-light sports for women, such as track.
- 42. Title IX also requires equal opportunity in the recruitment of student-athletes where equal athletic opportunities are not present for male and female students. Compliance will be assessed by examining the recruitment practices of the athletic programs for both sexes and evaluating whether the financial and other resources made available for recruitment in male and female athletic programs are equivalently adequate to meet the needs of each program. 1979 *Policy Interpretation*.
- 43. Title IX requires schools to provide women with equal treatment, including equipment and supplies; game and practice times; travel and per diem allowances; coaching and academic tutoring; assignment and compensation of coaches and tutors; locker rooms, practice

and competitive facilities; medical and training facilities and services; housing and dining facilities and services; and publicity. 34 C.F.R. §106.41(a) (2000), *Policy Interpretation*.

- 44. Lack of money is not a legal defense to sex discrimination. *See, e.g., Roberts Colorado State Univ.*, 814 F. Supp. 1507, 1518 (D. Colo. 1993) ("[A] financial crisis cannot justify gender discrimination."); *Favia v Indiana University of Pennsylvania*, 812 F. Supp. 578, 585 (W.D. Pa. 1993) (finding that financial concerns alone cannot justify gender discrimination); *Cook v. Colgate University*, 802 F. Supp. 737, 750 (1992) ("[I]f schools could use financial concerns as a sole reason for disparity of treatment, Title IX would become meaningless."); *Haffer v. Temple*, 678 F. Supp. 517, 520 (1987) (finding that financial concerns alone cannot justify gender discrimination).
- 45. Monies and in-kind benefits from third-party sources, such as donors, sponsorships, television rights, ticket sales, and student fees, are not a defense to a sex discrimination charge, whether those resources were used to build facilities, fund scholarships, provide equipment and uniforms, or any other benefit of sports participation. None of those sources of money creates a legal defense against sex discrimination. Schools must ensure that their students are not receiving second-class educational opportunities because they are female. See 20 U.S.C. § 1687 (2005); See Office for Civil Rights, *Department of Education, Further Clarification of Intercollegiate Athletics Policy Guidance Regarding Title IX Compliance* (June 11, 2003), *Cohen v. Brown Univ.*, 809 F. Supp. 978, 996 (D.R.I. 1992) (concluding that "all monies spent by Brown's Athletic Department, whether originating from university coffers or from the Sports Foundation [booster club] must be evaluated as a whole under § 106.41(c)")
- 46. It is *Champion Women's* experience that most athletes and former athletes are acutely aware of all the ways they are treated as second-class within their athletics department, because they are women. *Champion Women* asked current collegiate athletes what equality would look like under this list. Here's what the athletes came up with:
 - i. Men's and Women's sports would be equally featured, with equal prominence, on school and Athletic Department websites and social media.
 - ii. Schools would invest equally in cameras and production equipment for Women's and Men's sports.
 - iii. Schools would optimize Google searches for their Men's and Women's teams to receive equal search results.
 - iv. Women's and Men's sports would employ an equal caliber of talent in their sports information and marketing departments, and they would be paid and promoted equally.
 - v. Women's and Men's sports jerseys, apparel and memorabilia would be equally and easily accessible.
 - vi. The needs of Women's teams would not revolve around Men's football and men's basketball teams.

- vii. The Women's and Men's teams would have equal access to dining halls, nutrition, etc. at times equally convenient to both teams.
- viii. Men's and Women's teams would have equal access to optimal practice times when they share facilities.
- ix. Men's and Women's sports marketing efforts would focus on performance; Broadcasters and schools would not focus on a woman athlete's appearance or sexuality.
- x. Women's and Men's medical care and athletic training access would be equal; Neither male nor female athletes would have priority accessing these resources.
- xi. Schools would hire competition officials of the same quality, with equal compensation, for the Women's and Men's teams.
- xii. Men's and Women's sports performance staff would be equal and would be paid and promoted comparably.
- xiii. Schools would intentionally use language that equally prioritizes Men's and Women's sports.
 - 1. Teams would be referred to as "Women's Basketball" and "Men's Basketball."
 - 2. "Basketball" would not be used to refer to Men's Basketball.
 - 3. Schools would have Social Media handles that referred to men's and women's teams; "Oregon Soccer" would be changed to "Oregon Men's Soccer."
- 47. Mississippi for Women's own data, as outlined in the Factual Allegations above, demonstrate that it is not providing equal opportunities for its female students to participate in sports under Title IX's three-part participation test, in addition to treatment and benefits of sports participation, as required by Title IX.

V. RELIEF REQUESTED

- 48. *Champion Women* expects OCR investigators will find additional violations of Title IX, the law guaranteeing women equal educational opportunities, including athletics. *Champion Women* requests that OCR:
 - a. <u>Investigate</u> the Mississippi University for Women to determine whether it is discriminating against its female students in providing them with equal participation opportunities in varsity athletics, and receiving equal treatment and benefits.
 - b. Take all necessary steps to <u>remedy</u> any unlawful conduct that you identify in your investigation, as required by Title IX and its implementing regulations. Secure assurances of compliance with Title IX from the Mississippi for Women, that include full remedies for the violations found.
 - c. Among other steps to achieve compliance with Title IX, require Mississippi for Women to add more athletic opportunities for women, accord to additional teams and athletes the full range of benefits accorded to men's varsity teams and athletes, increase recruiting budgets and opportunities, and adopt and implement a plan to achieve compliance with Title IX.
 - d. <u>Monitor</u> any resulting agreement with the Mississippi University for Women to ensure that the school achieves full and complete compliance with Title IX throughout its athletic department, now and in the future.

I give OCR my consent to disclose my name and *Champion Women's* name contained in this letter to others for OCR's investigation of, and enforcement activities related to, the Discrimination Complaint.



Nancy Hogshead, J.D., OLY September 21, 2023