

**NEWS RELEASE**

For Immediate Release

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**Discrimination Lawsuit Filed Against New York City Department of Education and Public Schools Athletic League Calls for Equal Access to School Sports**

*17,000 New York City Black and Latino public high school students don't have any sports teams at their schools*

New York, NY – June 21, 2018 – Civil rights advocacy group New York Lawyers for the Public Interest filed a class action lawsuit today, representing student-led organization Integrate NYC and Black and Latino students denied access to New York City public high school sports.

The suit charges that the Department of Education (DOE) and Public Schools Athletic League (PSAL) have engaged in racial discrimination by denying Black and Latino students equal opportunity to play high school sports.

On average, Black and Latino students have access to far fewer teams and sports, and the city spends much less per student than for students of other races. Thousands of Black and Latino New York City public high school students attend schools that offer no team sports whatsoever, and Black and Latino students are twice as likely as students of other races to attend schools without sports teams.

Matt Diaz, one of the student plaintiffs, said: “Sports make me understand my compassion and my leadership. They help me handle things in life. I feel like I’m one of the only ones that has to fight for what I need, and this is making me seem like I’m lower than anybody else. Why isn’t it equal for all of us?”

The lawsuit, filed pursuant to the New York City Human Rights Law, seeks to level the playing field and create equal access to high school sports for all students, regardless of race. Advocates and students have pushed the DOE and PSAL to address this issue for years, and in 2016 formed the Fair Play coalition to bring attention to disparities. Patterson, Belknap, Webb & Tyler LLP and Emery, Celli, Brinckerhoff & Abady have joined as co-counsel.

As the suit details, access to school sports can affect students’ physical health, mental health, teamwork skills, fostering of community and friendships, and can influence college opportunities.

NYLPI attorney Melissa Iachan said: “The Department of Education has for years given Black and Latino students fewer teams, fewer sports, and fewer dollars. Segregation of school sports access is an alarming symptom of the broader segregation issues plaguing New York City public schools.”

Co-counsel Katie Rosenfeld of Emery Celli Brinckerhoff & Abady LLP said: “Separate and unequal access to team sports for Black and Latino students is shameful. The DOE can change its policies, and open the life-changing opportunity to join a team to all students – but it has refused to do so for decades.”

Fair Play Coalition member David Garcia-Rosen said: “It is unconscionable that in 2018 Black and Latino students don’t have the same athletic opportunities as other students in New York City. Fair Play is

hopeful that this legal action led by the New York Lawyers for the Public Interest will finally force the DOE to provide Black and Latino students with equitable access to the Public School Athletic League.”

Co-counsel Maren Messing of Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP said: “The numbers tell an indisputable story about the lack of sports opportunities for students at the most segregated New York City Public High Schools. The DOE and the PSAL can and should remedy this situation and provide equal opportunities to students across the City.”

The lawsuit was announced during a rally and press conference held today outside Tweed Courthouse in New York City, preceded by a student march downtown.

For more information, including a copy of the complaint, please visit [Nylpi.org](http://Nylpi.org)

### **About New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI)**

Founded 40 years ago by leaders of the bar, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest pursues equality and justice for New Yorkers. NYLPI works towards a New York where all people can thrive in their communities, with quality healthcare and housing, safe jobs, good schools, and healthy neighborhoods. In our vision, all New Yorkers live with dignity and independence, with the access and resources they need to succeed. NYLPI’s community-driven approach powers its commitments to civil rights and to health, disability, immigrant, and environmental justice. NYLPI seeks lasting change through litigation, community organizing, policy advocacy, pro bono service, and education.

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