



NEWS RELEASE

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FLORIDA SCHOOL BOARD SETTLES WITH, REINSTATES FEMALE COACH WHO WAS FIRED AFTER QUESTIONING SCHOOL'S TITLE IX COMPLIANCE

A female lacrosse coach who was fired after raising questions about whether the athletic program at a south Florida high school was being fair to female athletes has been reinstated and her team will get to play in the school's best athletic facility under terms of a newly signed settlement with the Martin County School Board.

The settlement, signed Friday, averted a lawsuit on behalf of Michele Ruth, head coach of the girls' lacrosse team at Jensen Beach High School in Stuart, Fla.

Public Justice, a national public interest law firm based in Washington, D.C., was on the brink of filing a federal lawsuit against the School Board on Ruth's behalf when the settlement agreement was struck, resolving her allegations of retaliation under Title IX. Public Justice is a leader in challenging violations of Title IX, a federal statute that prohibits sex discrimination in federally-funded education programs.

"I am happy and relieved to be back in the job and with the team I care so much about," said Ruth, who returned to work on September 28. "My players and I are excited about our first home game in the stadium and we're looking forward to building on the successes we've achieved in only two seasons."

Ruth was fired in June by Jensen Beach's athletic director, who made no secret of his displeasure over Ruth's questions about Title IX compliance at the school, particularly the treatment of the girls' varsity lacrosse team, which was the school's only varsity team that was not allowed to play home games in the school stadium, the top athletic facility on campus.

After an outpouring of support for Ruth by parents and lacrosse players, the high school offered to reinstate Ruth provided she agree to a set of strict conditions enumerated in a "Last Chance Agreement." One of those conditions was that she support the decision "that all girls' lacrosse home games will be played on the lacrosse field" and not in the stadium. The settlement agreement prohibits enforcement of any of the conditions listed in the "Last Chance Agreement."

“All too often, girls’ coaches are fired for raising valid Title IX concerns and schools don’t take corrective action until a court orders it,” said Public Justice Managing Attorney Adele Kimmel, co-counsel for Ruth. “We are pleased that the Martin County School Board took Michele Ruth’s Title IX concerns seriously and reinstated her as Head Coach of the Girls’ Lacrosse Team without the necessity of a lawsuit.”

In addition to requiring that the varsity girls’ lacrosse team play each of its home games in Jensen Beach’s stadium, it gives Ruth and the girls’ lacrosse team full access to “all facilities, resources and promotional opportunities available to other varsity coaches and teams.”

The Martin County School Board approved the settlement at a Board meeting on September 27. Linda M. Correia of Webster, Fredrickson, Correia & Puth in Washington, D.C., was co-counsel for Ruth.

Read the settlement agreement at <http://www.publicjustice.net/Repository/Files/RuthSettlement.pdf>

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Public Justice is a national public interest law firm that fights injustice and holds corporate and government wrongdoers accountable. See www.publicjustice.net.