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News

# Women's Rowing: UConn 'is in direct violation of Title IX'

By **Alison Cross** · April 22, 2021

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Members of the University of Connecticut women's rowing team allege that UConn's June 2020 deficit-driven decision to terminate rowing from its varsity roster violates Title IX, and some of the athletes have retained legal counsel to gear up for a potential class-action lawsuit if the parties do not come to a resolution.

UConn denied these claims and said that they remained in compliance with Title IX when they [announced last summer](#) that the women's rowing, men's swimming and diving, men's cross country and men's tennis teams would play their final season in 2020-2021 to meet mandated budget cuts. UConn does not have a varsity men's rowing team, though there is a men's rowing club team.

The women's rowing team took to the streets of Storrs in protest Monday afternoon to demand that UConn reinstate the team.

On Friday, UConn agreed to meet with lawyers representing students on the rowing team to provide information and discuss if the parties can reach an agreement without litigation.

Rowing team lawyers, Felice Duffy, James Larew and Claire Diallo, requested the meeting in an [April 12 letter](#) addressed to UConn President Thomas Katsouleas, Director of Athletics David Benedict and the board of trustees. The letter demanded that UConn share Title IX compliance data and cautioned that, "Unless UConn agrees to reinstate the women's rowing team immediately, [the lawyers] will file a class action lawsuit and seek a preliminary injunction immediately to preserve the status of the rowing team."

"UConn has responded and promised to produce relevant information this week, and we'll review it and see if there's a path towards resolution," said Duffy, a UConn student-athlete alumna.

***"BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER THESE TEAM CUTS, UCONN HAS NOT BEEN IN AND WILL NOT BE IN COMPLIANCE WITH TITLE IX, AS THE UNIVERSITY HAS AN UNACCEPTABLE PARTICIPATION GAP FOR FEMALE ATHLETES."***

April 12 Letter addressed to UConn President Thomas Katsouleas

Using data from UConn varsity rosters, the lawyers determined that UConn has maintained a participation gap of 20-34 fewer female than male athletes over the last three years. If the 2020-2021 student-athlete numbers remain constant for next season, the female participation gap will be 38 after the termination of women's rowing and the three men's sports, lawyers said.

"Both before and after these team cuts, UConn has not been in and will not be in compliance with Title IX, as the university has an unacceptable participation gap for female athletes. Therefore, in our opinion, as a matter of federal law, the university cannot eliminate a viable women's team, including women's rowing," the letter reads.

Title IX requires that schools provide equal opportunities for women's participation in sports proportionate to the student population. Schools do not necessarily need to provide male and female teams for the same sport.

"The university engaged in a comprehensive review of its athletic program in determining how many and which teams would be eliminated. UConn used its best efforts to eliminate as few teams as possible in the review, which included a careful analysis of Title IX compliance," said University Spokesperson Stephanie Reitz. "While the university certainly understands and appreciates the disappointment of those who supported the women's rowing team, we are confident that our actions in regard to that team and the other three eliminated teams were consistent with the university's obligations under Title IX."

***"IT WAS DEVASTATING TO HEAR THAT OUR TEAM WAS BEING CUT... THE FACT THAT OUR HEAD COACH WAS GIVEN LESS THAN 24 HOURS' NOTICE WAS QUITE FRANKLY JUST DISRESPECTFUL."***

Emily Torre, Fourth-Semester Member of the Rowing Team

Rowing is the largest women's team at UConn. As UConn's [athletic deficit](#) ballooned last year, team members thought rowing was safe from cuts—they were under the impression that their squad of 50-plus female rowers served to balance the football team that has exceeded 100 male athletes in a single season. Last summer, when they learned of their team's termination, UConn proved them wrong.

"It was devastating to hear that our team was being cut...The fact that our head coach was given less than 24 hours' notice was quite frankly just disrespectful," said Emily Torre, a fourth-semester molecular and cell biology major who has rowed on the team for two years. "Our team felt we had to fight this decision and not be complacent because I truly think that UConn thought that they could just cut us and no one would care, but people do care...The biggest thing we want the administration to know is that not only are they out of compliance with Title IX, and have been, but that our community cares about us as a team and respects us as athletes even if athletics doesn't."

Torre said that Monday's Title IX demonstration saw an outpouring of support from the community. Members of the team carried their paddles and rowing machines from the Student Union to Storrs center with IX written across their backs to draw attention to their cause.

Past UConn rowers have also shown their support. Earlier this month, the [Hartford Courant](#) reported that 23 UConn rowing alumna filed a Title IX complaint against the university with the Office of Civil Rights for slashing the team from its programs.

***"IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT GETTING OUR TEAM REINSTATED. IT'S ABOUT MAKING SURE OTHER WOMEN'S TEAMS ARE TREATED EQUALLY."***

Chloe Ludden, Rowing Team Captain

Emma Lucas, a fourth-semester material science and engineering major, said that if UConn does not reinstate women's rowing, the team will transition to a club sport. She said that she and other teammates are navigating this option with head coach Jennifer Sanford.

"Coach Jen has been trying her best to help us during this transition, and it's honestly so upsetting seeing what it's going to be like as a club," Lucas said. "Losing the incredible coaching staff, half the boathouse, potentially our erg [rowing machine] room, access to the weight room, funding for races and everything else is going to be really hard and something no one would want to have to deal with."

Rowing team captain Chloe Ludden, an eighth-semester psychology and human development and family sciences double major, said her teammates decided to act for every women's sport at UConn and all female rowing teams that receive unequal treatment in athletics.

"It's not just about getting our team reinstated. It's about making sure other women's teams are treated equally," she said.

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