

The Office of the Commissioner of Baseball
Robert D. Manfred Jr., Commissioner
245 Park Avenue
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New York, NY 10167

March 15, 2019

An Open Letter to Robert Manfred, Commissioner of Major League Baseball

Dear Commissioner Manfred,

We write to you as leaders of a nationwide movement to end violence against women, to ask that you take firm and appropriate action in disciplining San Francisco Giants CEO and President Larry Baer, for his conduct during a public, physical altercation with his wife, Pam Baer. While Mr. Baer has expressed regret for his behavior, we believe this incident represents more than an embarrassing private quarrel that spilled into public view. It is a test of how seriously Major League Baseball views its responsibility to hold its leaders, as it does with its players, to the highest standards of personal conduct.

In 2015, MLB became one of the first major professional sports leagues to adopt a policy on domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse. At the time, you expressed your pride in the baseball community for holding itself to a standard “that reflects the gravity and the sensitivities of those significant societal issues.” You noted, “we believe that these efforts will foster not only an approach of education and prevention but also a united stance against these matters throughout our sport and our communities.”

You were right.

The incident in question is precedent-setting, and not, as some have asserted, a squabble over a cell phone in which it appears that no laws were broken. Behavior does not have to be criminal in order for it to be wrong and contrary to the standards set by MLB.

This incident is about leadership and accountability. This is about culture and what it means for the leaders of a Major League Baseball club to be held to a higher standard of personal conduct.

After the video became public, Larry Baer admitted that, "This is not the person I aspire to be." We agree. And we imagine that so do the parents who enroll their children in the Junior Giants – an organization of 25,000 young people between the ages of 5 and 18 – who are taught about character, integrity, leadership, and bullying prevention. Junior Giants, a program that Northern California youth sports, development, and anti-violence advocates revere for its social impact, was chosen by your office as the recipient of the 2015 Commissioner's Award for Philanthropic Excellence. The program challenges children and their parents to envision what their community would look like without violence, abuse, and bullying. During Strike Out Bullying Week, children are taught that the definition of bullying includes "putting someone down by leaving them out, making fun of them, or *physically hurting them.*" The program calls on Jr. Giants coaches and team parents to lead all 25,000 children to commit to a pledge that reads:

I am a Junior Giant. I pledge to Strike Out Bullying by...

- Respecting my teammates, coaches, family, and friends,
- Giving up put-downs.
- Standing for what is right.
- Treating others the way I would like to be treated.
- Praising people and helping others.
- Showing my friends that a bully-free life is more fun.

Larry Baer's public display of physical aggression sends a conflicting and hypocritical message to these children and their parents – and to many of us who have worked closely with him and the Giants organization in the context of anti-violence and youth leadership initiatives for years. Our community, our nation, and our children deserve better.

Please don't allow yourself to be distracted by the public claims of attorneys over the legality of the behavior we all saw on that videotape. Baseball is better than this. The Giants are better than this. And our community is better than this.

MLB has publicly denounced bullying and abusive behavior. The unacceptable actions we saw in that video were nothing less – these are not the qualities of a leader.

We believe that leaders must be held to higher standards – particularly when they oversee an organization of several thousand employees who are expected and required to comply with the code of conduct that specifically calls on players to be “models of sportsmanship” wherever they are, and reminds them that they must always conduct themselves as a representative of MLB and with the honor that reflects positively on the League.

As CEO, Larry Baer sets policy and protocol for the Giants. He also shapes the culture. If anything, he should be held to a higher standard than players and employees who are not in such high-profile public roles.

This is about a man who used his power to physically dominate a woman (in public), and the responsibility that you, as well as the Board and executive leadership of the Giants organization, have to fairly enforce MLB policy, as you would had it been a major league player in that video, rather than a high-profile CEO.

As the public face of an organization that has prided and branded itself as a leaders teaching young people to do exactly the opposite of what we saw in the video,

Larry Baer cannot be allowed to resume his high profile role without significant consequences and accountability. It simply flies in the face of what the league and organization stands for and invests in.

It would also be a betrayal of the trust and confidence that we, as anti-violence and anti-bullying advocates, have placed in the Giants and in turn, MLB.

As commissioner, we know that you have significant power in determining how Larry Baer will be held accountable for his actions. If you fail to administer significant and meaningful consequences, it will then become the responsibility of the ownership and leadership of the Giants organization to do so. Some elements for consideration that would meet the high standard of accountability, as intended under MLB policy:

1. Reprimand – a strong public statement by you that MLB will not accept or tolerate such behavior by anyone in MLB, particularly an owner and a CEO.
2. Significant suspension from San Francisco Giants and Major League Baseball operations.
3. Substantial financial penalty that exceeds the minimum levied against players for incidents of domestic violence and physical abuse.
4. Requirement to complete an appropriate individualized specialized treatment plan with a professional or organization that specializes in domestic violence.

We know that MLB finds itself in an unprecedented situation and that many are watching to see how you will respond. This very serious incident presents an opportunity to demonstrate leadership, accountability – and courage.

We urge you to do the right thing, not only on behalf of baseball, but also on behalf of the public that loves your game and what MLB stands for. Make this a teaching moment, one that is of course fair, and that models for the next generation what it means to own one's actions and be held accountable for unacceptable behavior.

Only then will our community be in a position to come together and heal through a restorative process. Baseball and society will be better for it.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kathy Black, Executive Director, La Casa de las Madres

Beckie Masaki, former Founding Executive Director, Asian Women's Shelter

Sonia Melara, Founding Member, La Casa de las Madres

Debbie Mesloh, President, SF Commission on the Status of Women*

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*For Identification Purposes Only

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