



Northwest Women's Law Center

Advancing legal rights for women

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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YMCA Agrees to Drop Basketball League's Discriminatory Policy Prohibiting Mixed-Gender Teams

Exceptional 12-Year-Old Girl Basketball Player Can Play on Boys' Team

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PORTLAND, Oregon – September 11, 2008 – In a win for one seventh grader and all girl athletes, the Northwest Women's Law Center and cooperating attorneys Steenson, Schumann, Tewksbury, Creighton & Rose, P.C. today claimed victory in its challenge to an Oregon sports facility's discriminatory policy prohibiting mixed-gender basketball teams.

"Denying a girl participation on the team that is best suited for her particular skills and development just because she is female is discrimination, pure and simple," said Lisa M. Stone, Executive Director of the Northwest Women's Law Center. "Such a policy violates the law and deprives female athletes of equal opportunity as a matter of principle. It also denies them potential future athletic scholarship and employment opportunities."

The Northwest Women's Law Center and cooperating attorney Beth Creighton represent Jaime Nared, a 12-year-old who is already over six feet tall and is universally acknowledged as an exceptional basketball player. Now a seventh grader, Jaime had been playing with a boys' team since she was in the third grade – including in a basketball league and in tournaments organized by The Hoop, a private sports facility in Beaverton, Oregon. Her parents and coach determined that playing on a boys' team one level higher than her grade was the best fit for her skills and her age.

The situation garnered national attention in April 2008, after The Hoop told Jaime's coach that she could no longer play in its league because of a policy that prohibits mixed-gender teams.

Asked to change its policy, The Hoop refused and instead invited Jaime to play on a co-ed team in its league – even though The Hoop did not actually offer any co-ed team opportunities.

The YMCA of Columbia-Willamette took over operation of The Hoop's facilities in August 2008. After intense negotiations and a threatened legal challenge, the YMCA agreed not to enforce The Hoop's policy against mixed-gender basketball teams, stating that the policy was The Hoop's, not the YMCA's. Now, the YMCA's policy at The Hoop is that teams and leagues are generally organized by age, skill level, and gender, but exceptions may be granted based on the participant's "skill level, age, and maturation development" and the best interests of the player, team members, and all participants.

"We are pleased the YMCA has decided that athletes should be judged on their skill and talent, not on outdated stereotypes that are likely to perpetuate past discrimination. The law protects the people of Oregon from discriminatory practices in places that serve the public," noted cooperating attorney Beth Creighton.

Jaime's mother, Reiko Williams, said, "We never thought that in 2008, this kind of policy would exist and would prevent our daughter from playing just because she is a girl. We know what Jaime is capable of, so we are gratified that she can once again experience an appropriate level of competition and skill development."

Northwest Women's Law Center attorney Janet Chung added, "Abandoning The Hoop's discriminatory policy was the right thing to do. Now, Jaime and other talented girls like her can be judged on their merits, not based on an arbitrary policy."

The Northwest Women's Law Center is a not-for-profit legal organization dedicated to advancing legal rights for women and girls in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. The law firm Steenson, Schumann, Tewksbury, Creighton and Rose, P.C., of Portland, Oregon, specializes in the prosecution of employment and civil rights cases at the trial and appellate levels in both Oregon state and federal courts.

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