Joint Statement from Former Iowa State Women's Basketball Players

We are former Iowa State Women's Basketball players, and we call on the university to commission an independent, trauma-informed review of the program and its handling of player concerns. We also call on Iowa State to protect those who come forward from retaliation, publicly acknowledge the seriousness of these concerns, and commit to lasting reforms in how student-athletes are protected. We speak together to call for accountability in how student-athletes in this program have been treated. We speak for ourselves and for 4 other former players who shared their stories with us but are not ready to be publicly identified.

The one-game suspension of Head Coach Bill Fennelly has renewed attention to conduct that in our opinion reflects a longstanding problem in the Iowa State Women's Basketball program.

As former members of the Iowa State Women's Basketball team, we experienced or witnessed conduct we considered to be verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse from coach Fennelly. We reported what this and we believed was inappropriate physical contact to members of the coaching staff and Iowa State Athletic Administration, but we do not believe our concerns were taken seriously. Our individual experiences may differ, but we are united in our concerns about an environment where intimidation, humiliation, and fear became normalized.

We accepted the demands of hard work, discipline, and competitive excellence. But demanding excellence is fundamentally different from undermining an athlete's dignity, well-being, and sense of safety. For some of us, the consequences did not end with our playing careers. We continue to deal with anxiety, depression, diminished self-worth, and lasting distress that we associate with our time in the program.

We also believe the systems and supports meant to protect student-athletes repeatedly failed. Some of us felt dismissed, discouraged from speaking openly, or afraid of the consequences of raising concerns.

We sincerely appreciate Athletic Director Jared Benko's swift attention and immediate action following the incident that took place on November 15. Taking action right away matters. But a suspension addressing one incident does resolve, what is in our opinion, a pattern of behavior spanning almost ten years of student-athletes.

We call on Iowa State University to:

- Commission an independent, trauma-informed review of the program and the university's historical handling of player concerns, including what officials knew and whether complaints were properly investigated.
- Protect against retaliation and provide a confidential, safe process for current and former athletes to be heard.
- Publicly acknowledge the seriousness of these concerns and support affected players with mental health and physical health services.
- Commit to transparent, lasting reforms in how student-athlete welfare is protected.

We are proud to have represented Iowa State, and that pride is why we believe the university must hold itself to a higher standard. We do not speak for every woman who has worn an Iowa State uniform. We speak from our own experiences.

For years, many of us felt unable to speak. Today, we are choosing to speak together.

Winning does not excuse mistreatment. Loyalty to a program should never require silence. And protecting student-athletes must always outweigh protecting a reputation.

Maggie Espenmiller McGraw, Izabella Zingaro and 4 other Former Iowa State University Women's Basketball Players

To any former or current player reading this: you are not alone, and you do not owe anyone your story. If you would like support, want to share your experience, or want to add your name to this statement, you can reach Attorney Lori Bullock at lbullock@bullocklawpllc.com, (515)

423-0551. We will not share your name or your experience without your permission. If you are struggling right now, you can call or text 988 at any time.