

**“Tackling Toxic Workplaces: Examining the NFL’s Handling of Workplace Misconduct at
the Washington Commanders”
Committee on Oversight and Reform
10:00 AM, Wednesday, June 22, 2022
Statement for the Record
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)**

Thank you, Chairwoman Maloney, for calling this hearing to shine a light on the abusive, sexist, and discriminatory culture of the Washington Commanders. This hearing will focus on how the Commanders’ ownership and the National Football League (NFL) covered up misconduct to avoid accountability. This Committee is working to eradicate toxic workplace cultures and prevent efforts to shield those who perpetuate abuse. Despite Commanders and NFL attempts to halt our investigation, it persists. We are committed to strengthening protections for all workers.

In recent years, media reports revealed that the Commanders’ management supported and engaged in a workplace culture rife with sexual harassment and bullying. Daniel Snyder, the team’s owner, is at the center of this sordid, decades-long tale of abuse. Snyder is alleged to have directed the production of lewd videos of Commanders cheerleaders, invited prostitutes to company retreats, and touched female employees aggressively and inappropriately without consent. Many of the survivors of this abuse are my constituents. I’ve met with them and heard first-hand about how Mr. Snyder and other powerful figures perpetrated misconduct, discredited survivors’ stories, and worked tirelessly to ensure that they would never be held accountable for their actions.

In response to these allegations, the Commanders hired former federal prosecutor Beth Wilkinson to lead an independent investigation. Yet almost immediately, the NFL took control of the Wilkinson investigation and established a “Common Interest Agreement” with Snyder, one of the principal subjects of investigation. The Commanders and the NFL engaged in obfuscation and suppression of information to fend off potential litigation and to prevent public release of damning details.

At the conclusion of Wilkinson’s investigation, the NFL, in a break from normal investigation protocols, is alleged to have required Wilkinson to present her findings verbally to Commissioner Goodell, rather than submitting a written report highlighting key findings. The NFL put out a short, vaguely worded press release alluding to some inappropriate conduct and then fined the Commanders \$10 million. Furthermore, the press release went so far as to praise Mr. Snyder for taking, “important steps to make the workplace comfortable and dignified for all employees.” The NFL’s decision not to publicly release written findings stands in stark contrast to its handling of past investigations, notably investigations of the Ray Rice domestic abuse incident, “deflategate”, and the inappropriate behavior of former Panthers owner Jerry Richardson.

The NFL's refusal to release the full findings of the investigation or any written report raises questions about the extent of the misconduct at the Commanders, whether those responsible have been held accountable, and whether the NFL has taken appropriate actions to prevent future misconduct. Further, the NFL's establishment of a joint legal strategy with the principal subjects of investigation raises massive red flags about the independence and legitimacy of the investigation.

This Committee's investigation into the Commanders toxic work environment has reinforced the reported allegations of a culture of incentivized misconduct and abuse. Our work casts doubt on the reliability of the NFL's conclusions—and its actions in reaching those conclusions. Testimony from survivors at this Committee's February roundtable revealed that Mr. Snyder was personally aware of and involved in misconduct at almost every level. Rather than taking steps to make the workplace comfortable and appropriate, our investigation reveals that Mr. Snyder perpetrated a culture of abuse to maintain his power and avoid accountability. In fact, a *Washington Post* report found that Mr. Snyder and his legal team attempted to prevent Wilkinson from interviewing a former employee involved in a \$1.6 million settlement stemming from an allegation of sexual misconduct against Snyder.

Our work has also uncovered evidence that the Commanders engaged in financial impropriety that appears to have bilked its own customers out of \$5 million. Jason Friedman, director of marketing and sales at the Commanders for more than 20 years, detailed how the team withheld deposits from season-ticket holders and operated a shadow book to keep revenue from being shared with other teams. Unsurprisingly, Daniel Snyder appears to have had direct knowledge and oversight of these fraudulent practices.

Mr. Goodell, I am glad that you joined us this morning. I look forward to learning why the NFL blocked release of Ms. Wilkinson's investigatory report, and when we can expect it to be released. I also look forward to hearing what actions you will be taking as Commissioner to ensure safe work environments and accountability across the league going forward. I reiterate my demand that the NFL publicize the findings of the Wilkinson report in full.

Mr. Snyder has driven a beloved and storied franchise into the ground. His refusal to appear today will not hamper this Committee's work. We will strive for accountability by working to compel the NFL and the Commanders to release the Wilkinson report in full. But more importantly, he has left a trail of survivors, many of whom are my constituents, irrevocably harmed. My constituents and I are fed up. As Chairman of the Government Operations Subcommittee, employees within the federal civil service are within my jurisdiction, and I have always taken my responsibility to advocate for their safety seriously. These fundamental rights to a safe and respectful workplace should not end at the public sector. All workers deserve the ability to do their job free from harm and harassment.