

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 6, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Nicole M. Argentieri
Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Ms. Argentieri:

We write to you today to express our unease at the growing risk of match-fixing in the United States and its potential ties to organized crime around the world. As the United States plans to host the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Olympics—two of the biggest sporting events in the world—we must ensure American law enforcement has every tool at their disposal to protect the integrity of the games and fight against organized crime.

Incidents of match-fixing and the manipulation of sporting events have occurred for centuries and continue to cause major disruptions. For example, 38 players and five club officials were recently banned from playing soccer for life in China after it was revealed they had fixed over 120 matches.¹ There has also been an investigation into illegal Italian and Russian betting syndicates attempting to fix the Wimbledon Championships and other matches.² Additionally, it was revealed the Italian Mafia was involved in match-fixing across 30 soccer clubs.³ But not every example of match-fixing is as public or as clear, underscoring why we must carefully reexamine current federal law to ensure we can prosecute each of these crimes—even those that may not create headlines worldwide.

Organized crime has long manipulated sporting events, and their efforts are only getting more sophisticated. Match-fixing does not simply pose threats to the integrity of the game, but it can be connected to violent crime—including human trafficking, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and terrorism. These criminals have seized on illicit sports betting and match-fixing as a vehicle for laundering money and making incredible profits. Foreign, illegal online betting markets have become the perfect venues for these schemes, with studies showing that up to 10% of organized crime revenue is made from sports bets. Experts estimated in 2014 that \$140 billion is laundered annually through illegal and unregulated sport betting, an amount that has undoubtedly grown.⁴

¹ Qiaoyi Li & Ryan Woo, *China Bans 43 Soccer Players and Officials for Life for Match-Fixing*, REUTERS (Sept. 10, 2024), <https://www.reuters.com/sports/china-bans-43-soccer-players-officials-life-match-fixing-2024-09-10/#>.

² Simon Cox, *Tennis Match Fixing: Evidence of Suspected Match-Fixing Revealed*, BBC (Jan. 18, 2016), <https://www.bbc.com/sport/tennis/35319202#>.

³ Steve Scherer, *Italy Breaks Up Soccer Match-Fixing Network Involving Mafia*, REUTERS (May 19, 2015), <https://www.reuters.com/article/sports/italy-breaks-up-soccer-match-fixing-network-involving-mafia-idUSKBN00413T/#>.

⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Report on Corruption in Sport*, (2021).

While the most prominent examples of sports corruption have been international, there is risk of match-fixing in this country. For one, college sports in the United States are uniquely popular when compared to the rest of the world. Some argue athletes in college—who are young, often have shortened careers, and may be financially constrained—are more susceptible to exploitation from bad actors looking to fix a match. Unlike professionals, college students attend classes, live in residence halls and eat in the campus dining halls, providing ready access to their fellow students and fans; many of whom bet on their school’s teams and often using student bookmakers. This also significantly raises the risk of harassment of student-athletes, as a study recently found that 12% of total harassing comments made to student athletes were related to sports betting and match-fixing.⁵

Additionally, there has recently been a substantial uptick in legal sports betting in the United States, rising 44.5% from 2022 to 2023.⁶ During the Super Bowl, Americans bet over \$10 billion.⁷ However, a large illegal sports betting market still persists despite legalization in 38 states and D.C. Illegal operators offer wagers not available with legal options and don’t work with integrity monitors to ensure a fair outcome. Over \$63 billion is wagered illegally by Americans every year with no transparency, making it near impossible to uncover illicit bets.⁸

Given this risk, it is important to ensure the United States government has every possible tool to keep our sports safe for players and fans alike. Recently, experts questioned the ability of the government to address these concerns. While some point to the Sports Bribery Act as a solution to the issue of match-fixing, this statute only applies if bribery is involved in the manipulation. In many cases, organized crime uses extortion or tampering to fix matches, instead of bribery. Other statutes only apply where sports betting is prohibited—meaning the patchwork of legalized sports betting can hinder the use of these statutes to bring criminals to justice.⁹ When similar concerns were raised in countries around the world, their legislative bodies acted to make match-fixing a specific criminal act to address the full scope of match-fixing behavior and give their judicial and law enforcement systems the clarity and tools needed to bring these transnational criminals to justice.

Sport brings the world together, and we must fight to protect its integrity against the onslaught from criminals who exploit the vulnerable, target athletes for harassment, and corrupt the globe’s best traditions. The United States has one of the most vibrant sporting communities in the world, and it is imperative we support our athletes—from little league teams to collegiate stars to professional players.

⁵ Pete Iacobelli, *NCAA Pilot Study Finds Widespread Social Media Harassment of Athletes, Coaches and Officials*, A.P. NEWS (Oct. 10, 2024), <https://apnews.com/article/ncaa-athletes-social-media-harassment>.

⁶ Doug Greenberg, *Sports Betting Industry Posts Record \$11B in 2023 Revenue*, ESPN (Feb. 20, 2024), https://www.espn.com/espn/betting/story/_/id/39563784/sports-betting-industry-posts-record-11b-2023-revenue.

⁷ Thomas Schlachter, *How the US Became Hooked on Sports Betting – and the Cost it’s Having on Lives*, CNN (May 3, 2024), <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/03/sport/sports-betting-usa-impact-on-lives-spt-intl/index.html>.

⁸ Doug Greenberg, *Report: Americans Place \$63.8B in Illegal Sports Bets Each Year*, FRONT OFFICE SPORTS (Dec. 1, 2022), https://www.espn.com/espn/betting/story/_/id/39563784/sports-betting-industry-posts-record-11b-2023-revenue.

⁹ *See, e.g.*, 18 U.S.C. §§ 1952, 1953.

With that in mind, please respond to the following questions by December 20, 2024:

1. Please confirm if there are cases of match-fixing in the United States and if there any confirmed cases linked to organized crime. If so, please outline any public investigations in the last 5 years, including their locations, duration, implicated parties, and any other pertinent information.
2. What is the Department of Justice's (DOJ) assessment of the connection between organized crime and match-fixing in sports?
3. Has DOJ observed an increase in the incidence of sport betting with illegal operators in the United States?
4. How does DOJ evaluate the vulnerability of the college sports landscape to match-fixing? Does DOJ have a clear reporting mechanism for concerns of match-fixing, harassment, or coercion?
5. How does DOJ prioritize enforcement against match-fixing and what concrete steps are federal law enforcement officials taking to protect the integrity of sports against bad actors running illegal offshore sports books? Are other tools and resources necessary to protect the integrity of sports?

We look forward to working with you on this issue. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator