

Date: January 17, 2021

Mr. Robert Vowels, Athletic Director

4001 W. McNichols Rd.

Detroit, MI 48221

In re: NCAA Complaint Re: Coach AnnMarie Gilbert, Head Coach, University of Detroit Mercy

Dear Mr. Vowels,

We, the parents of the University of Detroit Mercy Women's Basketball Team, write to you with grave concern regarding the welfare of our daughters.

After having daily, detailed conversations with our daughters over the last several months; many of which were passionate and tearful cries for help, it has become painfully obvious that our young women are suffering emotional, mental and physical abuse under the leadership of their Head Coach AnnMarie Gilbert. Many of us have encouraged our daughters to seek the help of administration, however the girls are terrified of the retaliation from Coach Gilbert, who has created a hostile environment of fear and isolation.

Feeling great frustration and helplessness, we came together in a Zoom Meeting in which each family shared our individual daughter's experience. As a collective group, we were blown away by the horrific stories of utter disregard for the care and wellbeing of our student-athletes.

In addition, those of us who are former collegiate athletes and/or coaches, are clearly aware that there are possible NCAA violations being committed. In particular NCAA 19.1. This letter will provide information on incidents reported to us by our daughters over the last several months; many of which have been documented.

Coach Gilbert was hired in April of 2020 and inherited a group of ten extraordinarily spirited, competitive and academically successful young women who loved the game of basketball. Upon her arrival, she recruited and added four more equally impressive young women of like character and quality to the roster.

Despite the uncertainty of a Pandemic, the team and parents were very optimistic about a new start and chance to take the program in a more successful direction.

The University of Detroit Mercy Student Athlete Handbook states: "It takes a tremendous commitment of time and energy to be a successful NCAA Division I student-athlete. By aligning with the right people, services and best practices we are able to capitalize on the synergies of various talents and skills to better serve you.....You, as a student-athlete, are at the core of

everything we do and every decision we make. We seek to provide you with the greatest opportunity to be successful on the fields of play, in the classroom and in life.” We believed those sentiments to be true until the arrival of Coach AnnMarie Gilbert.

Coach Gilbert came out of the gate with high expectations, challenging the girls to get in the best physical shape possible over the summer. However, upon arrival to campus the challenges quickly became mandates and prerequisites for playing time. **Example: The following demands were made: 1 mile → 7 minutes, 1.5 miles → 11 minutes (posts), 10:30 minutes (guards), 2 miles → 16 minutes (posts), 15 minutes (guards).**

Coach Gilbert stated on several occasions that if those times were not made, players could not start and even went as far as to say that players would not play at all.

Coach Gilbert has made it very clear that her priority is basketball over academics.

For Example: She has been persistent with trying to get players to change their schedules and/or majors so that academic commitments do not interfere with practice. Several players have been asked to drop classes needed to graduate in order to comply with practice.

For Example: Biology majors must take labs as a requirement to graduate; all UDM labs are from 2-5 PM one day a week and practice is scheduled from 12-3 PM. Coach Gilbert instills fear and guilt in players for wanting to take these classes and accuses them of “not being committed to the success of the program.”

In addition, athletes who have outstanding academic records have been belittled in front of the team based on their grades and have been accused of not making basketball a priority. She has also required, what we believe to be excessive participation in athletically related activities that diverts them from time that could and should be dedicated to their academic studies.

For Example: Being directed to do extra workouts as a sign of commitment and when players try to decline the extra workouts with coaches/trainers due to schoolwork or even eating before and after practice, several remarks were made that insisted that basketball should come before education. Those players were also accused of “not being committed, not wanting to be good players, and not caring about the program.”

Furthermore, as stated in NCAA policy, student-athletes are not to exceed 20 hours of countable athletically related activities. These hours are to be tracked and verified on the official CARA log forms that are authenticated with the signature of a student-athlete. There is evidence that these regulations are not being followed.

For Example: There have been several instances where either practice begins anywhere from 15-20 minutes early and ends 10-15 minutes late. Start times are 11:40 AM and finish at 3:15 PM. Practice is scheduled from 12-3PM. Moreover, the coach will talk anywhere between 10-20 minutes after practice ends. NOTE: As recently as this week, the guards were instructed to be in the gym 45 minutes prior to the start of practice. Finally, no one knows who signs the CARA logs. Also, student-athletes who did not play substantial minutes in the games have been assigned to additional conditioning workouts that sometimes take place on off days or during the week *after* the 4-hour daily

limit has been surpassed. If not attended, players were put down and humiliated in front of the entire team. In addition, Coach Gilbert held film sessions after away games at both the University of Illinois Chicago and University of Wisconsin- Green Bay; again another activity that grossly exceeds countable athletically related activities.

It has also been reported by the players that Coach Gilbert is not organized or efficient in conducting practice. She never has a practice plan and her assistant coaches regularly must give her time warnings that she often ignores. This is also true during shoot around and warmups before games.

Perhaps most disturbing of all, Coach Gilbert has created a toxic environment in which players are afraid to honestly communicate their injuries and illnesses to the athletic trainer. Consequently, the head athletic trainer (Mike Miller) himself seems to have the same angst about communicating injuries and illnesses to Coach Gilbert, thereby creating extremely stressful and negative interactions between Coach Gilbert, trainers and players.

For Example: Players Aly Reiff, Kaela Webb, Markyia McCormick, Sylare Starks, Maxine Moore, and Jiera Shears just to name a few, have all had significant concerns regarding injuries and ailments that include but are not limited to: concussions, plantar fasciitis, bone bruises, fractures, migraines and even COVID-19 symptoms. Not one of those athletes who reported these injuries and symptoms were handled with care or concern. In fact, they were coerced and guilted into competing. They were told that "If your bone isn't sticking out, you need to be giving something." If the player persisted that she could not compete, Coach Gilbert bullied and persecuted that player for sitting out of practices and games. She has even instructed players to disregard or not to report COVID-19 symptoms in the middle of a pandemic, on game days. If the player did not comply, she told them she was "disappointed" in the student athlete for reporting the symptoms. Players have been shamed for acquiring injuries in practices and games by telling them to "Get up and get over it! It's a contact sport!" And "Stop limping! That's a loser's mentality." Players have also reported that the assistant coaches have also been humiliated and harassed in front of players and on the sidelines; most especially Coach Tim Webb, who is the only male on the staff.

In addition, Players have requested to see doctors and have been dissuaded by both Coach Gilbert and the Athletic Trainers asking, "why do you need to see a doctor?". Players have been warned against going to administration for any matter. There was an incident involving a player simply having a conversation with the Athletic Director inadvertently sharing a concern about access to equipment, and she was relentlessly reprimanded in a 45 minute closed door session regarding "hierarchy" and how "leaders do not go above the heads of coaches to report anything to administration." Later in the day, after a three hour practice, Coach Gilbert held a meeting for over an hour discussing the incident, and emphasized that she did not want them speaking to the athletic director for any reason, and that any and all issues are to be directed to her only.

Additionally, it has come to the point now where the players collectively feel anxiety when playing in practice or in games; so much so that they express that they do not even want to play for fear of making a mistake. It should be noted that players try to avoid directly interacting with Coach Gilbert for any reason out of genuine fear and anxiety. Several players report they are losing their love for the game. The environment has become so toxic and draining that players have made comments in the locker room about having suicidal thoughts as well as purposely injuring themselves so they would not have to face Coach Gilbert's belittling and emotional abuse. *Some players report that they have never had a battle with mental health until this season.*

Other concerns listed by the players:

- **Coach Gilbert has made several comments in practices and in the heat of close games that the players are replaceable, and that they can and will be replaced.**
- **Several players have witnessed Coach Gilbert interact unprofessionally with assistant coaches; insulting them and threatening to fire them.**
- **Coach Gilbert gossips and makes unkind comments about players during practice while on the sidelines (sometimes with her daughter who is a high school senior and not a member of the team), as well as in one-on-one meetings with different players.**
- **Coach Gilbert has made distasteful comments to the team such as: "I'm disgusted with ya'll", "Ya'll don't deserve to win", "You're cowards!", "Coward's limp, losers limp" (to injured players).**
- **The players have heard Coach Gilbert give up on them in the middle of games. Example: During the second quarter of a game, she made a disheartening comment about how she was "done" and that she should just keep her mask on and stay seated for the remainder of the game.**
- **Assistant Coach Tim Webb and Graduate Assistant Coach Tori Moreland have been the only people in which the players feel they can confide .**

Sadly, research shows that our complaint of the abuse and trauma perpetuated on our daughters is not the first time Coach AnnMarie Gilbert has been held accountable for such behavior. Her tenure at Eastern Michigan University came to an ungracious end when nearly identical complaints were made by her players and staff.

This letter is but a snapshot of the horrendous environment that our daughters have to endure every day. We come to you with our urgent request and implore you to take action to investigate immediately before something tragic happens. We request that an investigation be initiated immediately and Coach AnnMarie Gilbert be put on administrative leave pending the outcome of the internal investigation. We are not seeking any legal remedies at this time but reserve the right to further pursue any remedy we have. We truly appreciate you taking the time to read our complaint and look forward to a swift response to our daughters' pleas for help.

We will gladly provide signatures to this document upon request.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tim and Gunhild Corcoran
Parents of Annika Corcoran

[REDACTED]

Tom Fox and Cara Bennett
Parents of Bridgid Fox

[REDACTED]

Corey Harrison
Father of Cierra Harrison

[REDACTED]

Samuel Hoskin
Father of Sammivah Hoskin

[REDACTED]

Greg and Denise Johanson
Parents of Nicole Johanson

[REDACTED]

Maurice and Jannice McCormick
Parents of Markyia McCormick

[REDACTED]

Mike and Julie McDowell
Parents of Abigail McDowell

[REDACTED]

Merrideth Okonkwor and Domasque Moore
Parents of Maxine Moore

[REDACTED]

James and Lisa Norman
Parents of Alicia Norma

[REDACTED]

Tom and Julie Puletti
Parents of Maddie Puletti

[REDACTED]

Stan and Randee Reiff
Parents of Aly Reiff

[REDACTED]

Jeff and Danielle Shears
Parents of Jiera Shears

[REDACTED]

Michael and Sylvia Starks
Parents of Sylare Starks

[REDACTED]

Shakela Webb
Mother of Kaela Webb

[REDACTED]

Cc: Dr. Antoine Garibaldi, President

Ms. Teri Kromrei, Associate Athletic Director, Women's Basketball

Mr. Steve Corder, Assistant Athletic Director, NCAA Compliance

Ms. Therese Joyce, Assistant Director of Enforcement, NCAA

Ms. Sherika Montgomery, Assistant Director of Enforcement, NCAA