CHANGES AHEAD FOR THE NFL

The NFL has a domestic and sexual violence problem. According to statistics from the San Diego Union Tribune, out of 32 NFL teams, 21 employed a player with a domestic or sexual violence charge on their record in 2013. But more than the numbers, the NFL has a serious problem with how it responds to such crimes. The case of Ray Rice is just the most recent example.

Let’s review the facts: in February of this year, Baltimore Raven running back Ray Rice allegedly punched his fiancée (now wife) in the head during an argument at a hotel in Atlantic City. Surveillance video then showed Rice dragging her apparently unconscious body from an elevator. Although Rice was indicted for aggravated assault, the charges were later dropped when he agreed to undergo counseling. Fast forward to July, when the NFL handed down its punishment: a two game suspension, and a fine of $58,000.

This may seem like an adequate punishment... that is, until you consider the punishments handed down by the NFL for other infractions. Cleveland Brown Josh Gordon got a one-year suspension for smoking marijuana. Oakland Raider Terrelle Pryor was suspended for five games for receiving free tattoos as an undergrad at Ohio State. Baltimore Colts player Robert Mathis was suspended for four games for taking unapproved fertility drugs. When Rice’s suspension is compared to those handed out for these infractions — all of which are clearly less severe in nature than punching a woman so hard that she was rendered unconscious — it is clear that his “punishment” is essentially a joke. It is also clear that the NFL simply does not care about domestic violence.

In 2012, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell promised to address the league’s domestic violence problem. It’s 2014, and things are just as bad — if not worse. But the Rice issue has forced the NFL to make a change. In response to the outrage over Rice’s inadequate punishment, the NFL has announced a new domestic violence policy; first time offenses will result in a six game suspension, and a second offense will result in an indefinite ban from the league, with the ability to apply for reinstatement after one year.

NOTE: This article was current at the time the newsletter went to print. Since that time, more facts have come to light that call the NFL’s actions into serious question. For more on this subject, please visit our blog at http://www.blackburncenter.org/#blog/c13k9.

CAMPUS SEXUAL ASSAULT BILL PROPOSED

As college students head to school this fall, a new bill that addresses the issue of campus sexual assault is working its way through Congress. The Campus Accountability and Safety Act is a bipartisan bill that would impose significant financial penalties on colleges for failing to comply with new federal laws that require them to release data about sexual violence on campus. This data would not come from college administrators but from the students themselves, through a survey. The survey, funded by the federal government, would be an annual questionnaire to ask all undergraduate students about their experiences with sexual violence. Under this bill, every college would be mandated to participate in the survey, and to publish the results online. Colleges would still be subjected to the financial penalties provided in current federal law, but these would increase from the current $35,000 to $150,000 per violation under this legislation. This legislation would go a long way in ensuring transparency, as college administrators could no longer hide or downplay incidents of sexual assault in order to maintain their public image.

In addition to the survey, the bill proposes an overhaul of the financial penalty system. Colleges are currently at risk of losing their federal funding for mishandling sexual assault cases under the Clery Act. But because that punishment is so extreme, and could shut down a college completely, it has never been imposed. This new legislation would change that equation, proposing a fine of up to 1% of a college’s operating budget. This would result in a large fine for a university, but one that likely wouldn’t impact students — especially at larger universities. For example, a major violation at a University with an annual operating budget of $1.5 billion dollars would result in a $15 million dollar fine: a significant amount, but not one that would close the university. Of course, the impact would be greater at smaller colleges/universities.

The bill is not simply focused on penalties, however. It would also change the way that colleges handle complaints and provide services to victims. Colleges would be required to provide confidential advisers to victims and to train counselors. They would need to implement a uniform plan for handling sexual assault cases with local law enforcement, and athletic departments would not be permitted to take the lead in adjudicating sexual assault complaints, reversing a practice that is reportedly currently seen on 20% of college campuses. These changes — combined with a better penalty system and increased transparency — are important strategies in addressing the epidemic of campus sexual assaults.

Here in Westmoreland County, Blackburn Center has been in partnership since 2008 with Seton Hill University to develop university-wide primary prevention programming to address the issue of gender violence — including the incidence of sexual violence on campus. The University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg launched a similar project with Blackburn Center earlier this year. This proactive approach, to address the root causes of gender violence while assessing the effectiveness of university policy in response to sexual assault, will serve as a model to other colleges and universities.
CALLING ALL WRITERS!

One of our favorite features of our new and improved website is our blog — the perfect place for us to share information on important topics without the space limitations of social media. Of course, we realize that throughout our community, there are a wide variety of views on these subjects — and we want to hear them! If you are passionate about issues related to domestic and sexual violence (or gender equality, or how “media hurts”), we would love to host you as a guest blogger on our website.

If you are interested — or know anyone who might be — please submit all entries to ErinP@blackburncenter.org. Our guidelines for submissions are below:

• Topic can vary, but should in some way relate to Blackburn Center’s mission.

• While we are interested in hearing a variety of views on these subjects, we will not post content that is fundamentally in opposition to our understanding of gender violence.

• Photos related to the content of the submission are welcome as well, but please only submit a photograph that you took personally and which you are willing to allow us to utilize without compensation.

• Please also feel free to use hyperlinks, particularly to provide references for any information you are sharing. We particularly ask that you provide links to credible citations for any particular figures or statistics that you cite in your submission.

• We ask that you please submit original content that has not been published elsewhere, and that you do not publish the content elsewhere after it is posted.

• Please include a two or three line biographical statement to run at the end of the piece.

• We reserve the right to edit guest posts for content and clarity.

• Please note that we will include the following disclaimer at the end of all guest posts: “Please note that the views expressed by guest bloggers represent their own personal views, and not necessarily those of Blackburn Center.”

• We will notify you in advance of whether we will be able to run the submission and, if so, when; we’d ask you to please help promote the post via FaceBook, Twitter, email, or whatever other means available to you

• Unfortunately, we are not able to offer any compensation for guest submissions at this time.

Visit Us On Facebook | https://www.facebook.com/blackburncenterpa
In 1853, Esther Howland brought young girls into her Massachusetts home to hand-color valentines. She provided them with shelter and an opportunity to earn a livelihood. In that tradition, this specially created collector’s card was designed by a Blackburn Center client.

THE AGENCY’S COMMITMENT

In April 2014, Blackburn Center’s Board of Directors approved an updated Mission Statement and adopted Vision and Values Statements, to clearly articulate the agency’s commitment to ending violence and to providing excellent client services.

Vision
Blackburn Center envisions a world free from domestic and sexual violence.

Mission Statement
Blackburn Center advocates for the rights of all individuals to live free from domestic and sexual violence in their homes and communities by eliminating the root causes of this violence and providing for the well-being and safety of survivors/victims.

Values
1. Commit to outstanding services.
   (client-driven services; continuous improvement through evaluation; competency focus; commitment to diversity)
2. Maximize resources through ethical stewardship.
   (funds, staff, volunteers, Board of Directors, community relationships, goodwill, courage of spirit, reputation, opportunities, knowledge base/expertise, survivors’ experiences)
3. Challenge the social norms that perpetuate gender violence.
   (purposeful view of all aspects of the agency’s work through a social transformation perspective)

Reminders…

■ Are Taxes on Your Mind?
As the tax year draws to a close, here’s something to remember: you can donate your car, motorcycle, truck or boat to Blackburn Center and receive a tax deduction. For more information, call us at 724-837-9540 and ask for someone on the Administrative Team.

■ United Way Campaign
All Westmoreland County United Way agencies need your help, now more than ever. The stronger they are, the stronger we are. Please consider directing your contribution to the Community Impact Fund or to Blackburn Center. Blackburn Center’s donor designation number is 382.

■ 2014 Annual Report
To reduce costs and environmental impact, we will be posting Blackburn Center’s Annual Report on our website: www.blackburncenter.org. Watch for the 2013/2014 report in December 2014. Please let us know if you’d like a hard copy sent to you; call 724-837-9540, x104.
Blackburn Center Against Domestic & Sexual Violence is a private, not-for-profit organization that provides 24-hour hotline services, counseling, advocacy and support groups to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, incest, child sexual abuse, and sexual harassment; emergency shelter is available to survivors of domestic violence and their dependent children. Blackburn Center also provides community education, school student awareness programs, and in-service professional trainings throughout Westmoreland County.

Contact Information
Office 724-837-9540
Fax 724-837-3676
Hotline 724-836-1122
Toll Free Hotline 1-888-832-2272
Website www.blackburncenter.org

Blackburn Center is funded in part by United Way of Westmoreland County, PA Department of Public Welfare funds, including Title XX and Act 44 funds, foundations and local contributions.

A copy of official registration and financial information for Blackburn Center may be obtained from the PA Department of State by calling within Pennsylvania 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

PO Box 398
Greensburg, PA 15601-0398

Address Service Requested

Executive Director Ann Emmerling
Solicitor QuattriniRafferty, PC

Board of Directors
President Sheri Boyle
Vice President Jerry Supko
Secretary Autumn Stankay
Treasurer Mara Bradford
Members Becky Campbell Sheila Confer
Clare Dooley Lauren Farrell
Mary Ann Gawelek Rob Hohn
Carley Huffman Irene Rothschild

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
 Permit No. 648
Greensburg, PA

LIVE UNITED
United Way of Westmoreland County
Donor Designation 382

PLEASE NOTE: Deliver donations to Blackburn Center’s administrative offices on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 AM to 4 PM. Please call if you cannot bring your donation during regular business hours. We can make other arrangements if necessary.

THE HOLIDAY GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING…

As the holiday season approaches, please keep our needs list (LEFT) in mind if you’re looking for an alternative to traditional gift-giving. Making a gift of items from the needs list, or donating the financial resources to purchase those items, is a wonderful way to honor someone special in your life. We’ll be happy to send a card acknowledging your gift. Donating items helps to sustain the shelter program, and maintain the support groups the agency provides for women and children. Some of these items are made available to women and their children who are establishing their own homes and need support with basic household items.

Please put the items in bold at the top of your shopping list, and help Blackburn Center manage donations by bringing new items. If you have used items to donate, the agency can provide a list of thrift shops in the area that make items available to Blackburn Center shelter residents at no cost to them.