

STATE OF NEW YORK
DIVISION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**DIVISION OF HUMAN RIGHTS TO INVESTIGATE ALLEGATIONS OF
RACIAL EPITHETS AT SOUTHERN TIER JUNIOR VARSITY
SOCCER GAME**

The New York State Division of Human Rights (“Division”) today announced that it has agreed to investigate complaints filed following an October 4, 2008, junior varsity soccer match between the Horseheads Central School District and Vestal Central School District, where alleged racist comments were directed at Horseheads players and their coach.

The Division agreed to conduct an independent, impartial, and unbiased investigation at the request of the Horseheads and Vestal district superintendents and the Southern Tier Athletic Conference (“STAC”) president, who met at the Division’s Binghamton office on October 23, 2008.

Vestal Superintendent Mark A. Capobianco, Horseheads Superintendent Ralph Marino, Jr., and STAC President Richard T. Stank, issued the following joint statement after the meeting: “We have requested, and fully agree to participate in, an investigation of the allegations of October 4, 2008, to ensure that every possible effort has been taken to reveal the truth about what did and did not happen.”

Division Commissioner Galen D. Kirkland stated: “The Division gladly accepts the invitation to investigate these serious allegations in a fair and impartial manner. The Human Rights Law empowers the Division to investigate incidents involving allegations of discrimination in communities around the state and, in appropriate situations, work with those communities to implement remedial measures.”

As the Division’s investigation will take some time, Commissioner Kirkland, both Superintendents, and President Stank have agreed to work together to carefully monitor, for all 20 member schools of STAC, the existing zero tolerance policy for acts of discrimination or bigotry at all STAC events, and to ensure that all athletes - irrespective of race, color, creed, sex, sexual orientation, religious affiliation and all other protected categories - have an equal opportunity to compete.

Commissioner Kirkland urged the community to work together and exercise restraint during the investigation. He stated: “Drawing premature conclusions about this matter will be counterproductive to the investigation. We ask for patience and will work closely with both Superintendents and STAC during the investigation’s pendency to ensure that no similar incidents occur and to avoid acts of retaliation.”

The Commissioner has requested that representatives of the school districts and STAC refrain from making public comments on the matter until the investigation is concluded.

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New York has the proud distinction of being the first state in the nation to enact a Human Rights Law, which affords every citizen “an equal opportunity to enjoy a full and productive life.” The New York State Division of Human Rights was created to enforce this important law and does so through, among other things, the vigorous prosecution of unlawful discriminatory practices and the receipt, investigation, and resolution of complaints of discrimination. Please visit the Division’s website at www.dhr.state.ny.us for additional information about the agency and its work.