

Advocates say policy, mindset changes needed to combat rape on campus

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Reported by Hayley Mason

NASHVILLE, TN (WSMV) -

The University of Tennessee is the latest school to fall under scrutiny for sexual assaults allegedly committed by athletes. Tennessee settles Title IX lawsuit for \$2.48 million

Those are the claims of some of the unidentified victims.

As the university has agreed to pay millions of dollars to the women, advocates are calling for a shift in policy and mindset.

Rep. Brenda Gilmore, D-Nashville, and many others were hurt to hear claims of sexual assaults by athletes at UT. She was even more concerned to hear some of the alleged victims say their claims of rape were met with indifference.

"It's very concerning as a legislator and also as a parent," Gilmore said.

The university announced Tuesday it will pay nearly \$2.5 million to settle the lawsuit from eight women who claim the school violated Title IX laws and created a "hostile sexual environment."

Gilmore said universities need to set the standard that athletes are not privileged when it comes to rape or crime.

"I think colleges and universities across this country and especially in the state of Tennessee have to assume some responsibility to make sure that they have classes, to make sure that when sexual assaults are reported that they address them immediately," Gilmore said.

UT is not using tax dollars, student tuition or donor funds to pay the settlement. The athletics department and central administration will split the bill.

Gilmore and victim's advocates said it's not about the money, but about justice and future prevention.

"We would love to see a shift in policy and education on college campuses where we are teaching our entire student body what consent is, what consent isn't, and we are talking with our entire student body and our athletes about bystander intervention and what we can all do to be a part of the solution," said Jessica Labenberg with Sexual Assault Center of Nashville.

The president of the university said in the coming weeks, he will appoint an independent commission to review and strengthen existing programs around sexual assault at UT.

If you or anyone you know has been a victim of sexual assault, [click here](#) for more information.

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