



## STATE OF FLORIDA

### JAMES UTHMEIER ATTORNEY GENERAL

March 25, 2026

Roger Goodell  
Commissioner  
National Football League  
345 Park Avenue, 5th Floor  
New York, NY 10154

Dear Mr. Goodell,

As a Floridian, I wish the Miami Dolphins well with their new head football coach. As Florida's chief legal officer, however, I write with a word of caution to the NFL on its race-and-sex-based hiring policies. As applied in Florida, the NFL's "Rooney Rule," which governs the hiring of certain team executives and coaches, brazenly violates Florida law. So, too, do the NFL's related "diversity" initiatives.

The Rooney Rule aims to "increase the number of minorities hired in head coach, general manager, and executive positions."<sup>1</sup> It requires all teams to interview "two minority candidates" for head coach, general manager, and coordinator positions and "one minority candidate" for QB coach and other senior executive positions.<sup>2</sup> On top of the Rooney Rule, the NFL incentivizes teams by rewarding third-round draft picks to those that "developed minority talent that went on to become general managers or head coaches across the league."<sup>3</sup> The NFL also mandates "that all teams must employ a female or minority coach as an offensive assistant."<sup>4</sup>

If that weren't enough, for employee training and apprenticeship, the NFL's Coach & Front Office Accelerator Program seeks to "strengthen the pipeline of diverse candidates across all levels of the league" by "providing leadership opportunities to diverse

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<sup>1</sup> *The Rooney Rule*, NFL, [operations.nfl.com/inside-football-ops/inclusion/the-rooney-rule/](https://operations.nfl.com/inside-football-ops/inclusion/the-rooney-rule/) (last visited Mar. 25, 2026).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* In 2022, the NFL expanded the "minority candidate" definition under the Rule to include women. *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Inclusive Hiring*, NFL, [operations.nfl.com/inside-football-ops/inclusion/inclusive-hiring/](https://operations.nfl.com/inside-football-ops/inclusion/inclusive-hiring/) (last visited Mar. 25, 2026).

candidates” and “the opportunity to build relationships with club owners and executives ahead of the hiring cycle.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the Mackie Development Program “provides an opportunity for college-level officials not yet working in the NFL to be exposed to some of the same experiences as NFL officials ... with an emphasis on diverse candidates.”<sup>6</sup>

Under NFL policy, therefore, a franchise may wish to hire an experienced, highly qualified candidate, but it can’t do so for certain positions *if the candidate happens to belong to a particular race*. At least not immediately. The franchise must first interview and consider two other candidates *because of their race*. And for offensive-assistant applicants, a franchise that hasn’t met the NFL’s race-and-sex quota must stiff-arm the non-minority, male applicant from employment. Plus, “diverse” employees get “opportunities” for advancement not available to non-“diverse” employees. These methods of directing the selection and training of certain executives, coaches, and other employees based on skin color and sex is discriminatory and violates Florida law.

The Florida Civil Rights Act prohibits employers from “fail[ing] or refus[ing] to hire any individual”; “limit[ing], segregate[ing], or classify[ing] employees or applicants for employment in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities”; and “discriminat[ing] against any individual with respect to compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment,” because of the “individual’s race, color, religion, sex, pregnancy, national origin, age, handicap, or marital status.”<sup>7</sup> The Act also prohibits employers from discriminating based on those same characteristics “in admission to ... any program established to provide apprenticeship or other training.”<sup>8</sup> The Rooney Rule and its offshoots require precisely what Florida law forbids. They require teams to limit, segregate, and classify applicants for certain employment and training opportunities because of race and sex. And they do so in a way that tends to deprive applicants of opportunities for employment.

Applicants of certain approved races are guaranteed at least two interview opportunities, while applicants of disapproved races are not. Applicants of certain approved races and sex are guaranteed employment for certain positions, while applicants of

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<sup>5</sup> *Front Office & General Manager Accelerator to be Held During December League Meeting in Dallas*, NFL (Dec. 7, 2023), [operations.nfl.com/updates/football-ops/front-office-general-manager-accelerator-to-be-held-during-december-league-meeting-in-dallas/](https://operations.nfl.com/updates/football-ops/front-office-general-manager-accelerator-to-be-held-during-december-league-meeting-in-dallas/).

<sup>6</sup> *NFL Mackie Development Program*, NFL, [operations.nfl.com/officiating/the-officials/officiating-development/nfl-mackie-development-program/](https://operations.nfl.com/officiating/the-officials/officiating-development/nfl-mackie-development-program/) (last visited Mar. 25, 2026).

<sup>7</sup> § 760.10(1), Fla. Stat.

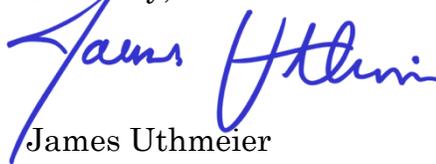
<sup>8</sup> § 760.10(4), Fla. Stat.

disapproved races and sex are not. And persons of certain approved races and sex receive special training and apprenticeship opportunities, while persons of disapproved races and sex do not. In other words, people with race and sex characteristics that the NFL doesn't like are deprived of employment and training opportunities available to people with race and sex characteristics that the NFL likes. This policy is blatant race and sex discrimination. And it is illegal under Florida law.<sup>9</sup>

The NFL's own Executive Vice President of NFL Operations has acknowledged that the NFL should create "a workplace culture that doesn't require mandates to interview people of color and minorities."<sup>10</sup> If that is so, then stop discriminating based on race. Stop discriminating based on sex. Interview, hire, and train based on merit. If merit-based employment should exist anywhere (and it should exist everywhere), it is in the NFL. NFL fans in Florida don't care what color their coach's skin is. They care what colors their coach is wearing—and that those colors are winning on the football field.

The Rooney Rule and its offshoots are illegal in Florida. Therefore, please confirm no later than May 1, 2026, that the NFL will no longer enforce the Rooney Rule or any variation or extension thereof—which requires consideration of race, sex, or any other prohibited classification—on teams in Florida. Failure to provide such confirmation may result in a civil rights enforcement action.

Sincerely,



James Uthmeier  
Attorney General

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<sup>9</sup> The NFL's methods are also illegal under federal law. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(a)(2) (stating that it is "an unlawful employment practice" for an employer "to limit, segregate, or classify his employees or applicants for employment in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin"); 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(d) (stating that it "shall be an unlawful employment practice for any employer ... to discriminate against any individual because of his race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in admission to, or employment in, any program established to provide apprenticeship or other training").

<sup>10</sup> *Inclusive Hiring*, NFL, [operations.nfl.com/inside-football-ops/inclusion/inclusive-hiring/](https://operations.nfl.com/inside-football-ops/inclusion/inclusive-hiring/) (last visited Mar. 25, 2026).

Cc: Stephen Ross, Chairman and Managing General Partner  
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