

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Ahead of World Cup championship match, Baldwin joins colleagues in bicameral letter calling out FIFA's anti-LGBTQ+ stance

Posted on Friday, Dec 16, 2022

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) joined 29 of her colleagues in sending a bicameral letter to FIFA President, Gianni Infantino, expressing outrage over the association's decision to censor support for LGBTQ+ rights by fans and players at the 2022 World Cup.

"We write today with concern regarding FIFA's decision to penalize players in the 2022 World Cup for wearing 'OneLove' armbands in support of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as reports that spectators wearing clothing in support of the LGBTQ+ community faced confrontation from officials at events," **wrote the lawmakers.**

"It is our understanding that team captains from several European teams competing in the World Cup intended to wear OneLove armbands as a signal of support for LGBTQ+ inclusion and diversity, but were instructed by FIFA that doing so would result in the issuance of in-game sanctions (e.g. yellow cards)," **they continued.** "This is in contrast to the typical monetary fine issued for uniform violations, and ultimately deterred players from adorning their uniforms with the armbands."

The lawmakers' letter expresses deep concerns with the unprecedented actions taken by FIFA to silence players in their attempt to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights

around the globe.

“[T]hese actions stand in stark contrast to FIFA’s own commitments. FIFA has promoted its own ‘No Discrimination’ campaign, featuring different captains’ armbands, and released a statement indicating that, ‘FIFA is an inclusive organization and supports all legitimate causes, such as ‘One Love’,” **the lawmakers continued.** “If FIFA believes itself to be an inclusive organization that supports causes like the OneLove movement, then its erasure of the movement’s armbands and other LGBTQ+ symbols and apparel in support of its own campaign runs counter to its public attestations about the values it espouses.”

In order to meaningfully reaffirm the principle that harassment and discrimination are not tolerated at FIFA sanctioned events—including the next World Cup set to be held jointly in North America, including the United States, and the Women’s World Cup kicking off in less than a year—the lawmakers specifically ask the following:

1. To what extent will FIFA consider government’s track record on LGBTQ+ rights when determining where to host future World Cups?
2. Will FIFA commit to consistent future policies with respect to players’ uniforms; fans’ apparel, signs, and symbols; and other forms of expression that allows for individuals to demonstrate support for the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups?
3. Will FIFA commit to reviewing its protocols for how it engages with host country governments?

The letter was led by Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Representatives Mark Pocan (D-WI-02), Mark Takano (D-CA-41), and Ritchie Torres (D-NY-15). The letter was also cosigned by Senators Edward J. Markey (D-MA), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Richard Durbin (D-IL), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Jack Reed (D-RI), and Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Representatives Lloyd Doggett (D-TX-35), Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ-03), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR-01), David Cicilline (D-RI-01), Sara Jacobs (D-CA-53), Dina Titus (D-NV-01), Sharice Davids (D-KS-03), Dwight Evans (D-PA-03), Paul Tonko (D-NY-20), Jerry Nadler (D-NY-10), Nikema Williams (D-GA-05), Chris Pappas (D-NH-01), Angie Craig (D-MN-02), and Grace Meng (D-NY-06).

This letter is supported by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC).

The full letter can be found [here](#) and below:

Dear Mr. Infantino:

We write today with concern regarding FIFA's decision to penalize players in the 2022 World Cup for wearing "OneLove" armbands in support of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as reports that spectators wearing clothing in support of the LGBTQ+ community faced confrontation from officials at events.

It is our understanding that team captains from several European teams competing in the World Cup intended to wear OneLove armbands as a signal of support for LGBTQ+ inclusion and diversity, but were instructed by FIFA that doing so would result in the issuance of in-game sanctions (e.g. yellow cards). This is in contrast to the typical monetary fine issued for uniform violations, and ultimately deterred players from adorning their uniforms with the armbands. We write to express our deep concern with these unprecedented actions taken by FIFA to silence players in their attempt to advocate for the worthy and legitimate cause of LGBTQ+ rights.

Soccer is often called the universal language, but FIFA's position undermines the sport's power of transcending divisions and bringing people together. The association's practices have not been limited to the players, either. We are also concerned about reports that spectators wearing apparel or bearing symbols that show support for the LGBTQ+ community have been detained, harassed, denied entry to events, or have had their apparel or possessions confiscated. These actions have culminated in a message to LGBTQ+ people that neither they nor their allies are welcome at the World Cup, contrary to several public statements made about the tournament.

Moreover, these actions stand in stark contrast to FIFA's own commitments. FIFA has promoted its own "No Discrimination" campaign, featuring different captains' armbands, and released a statement indicating that, "FIFA is an inclusive organization and supports all legitimate causes, such as 'One Love'." If FIFA believes itself to be an inclusive organization that supports causes like the OneLove movement, then its erasure of the movement's armbands and other LGBTQ+ symbols and apparel in support of its own campaign runs counter to its public attestations about the values it espouses.

Sports are about belonging, well-being, and affirming one's place amongst their peers and fellow fans. Indeed, with the 2026 World Cup set to be hosted by in North

America—including 60 matches set to be played in the United States—we cannot remain silent while this discrimination continues. Every person—regardless of who they are or whom they love—has the right to be treated with decency and respect, and to live their life free from fear of discrimination. No one should be denied the opportunity to participate in daily life or their love of a sport because of who they are, and no one should be silenced for standing up for those rights.

We implore FIFA to meaningfully reaffirm the principle that harassment and discrimination are not tolerated at their sanctioned events, consistent with the association's own campaign and public statements. Specifically, we ask:

1. To what extent will FIFA consider government's track record on LGBTQ+ rights when determining where to host future World Cups?
2. Will FIFA commit to consistent future policies with respect to players' uniforms; fans' apparel, signs, and symbols; and other forms of expression that allows for individuals to demonstrate support for the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups?
3. Will FIFA commit to reviewing its protocols for how it engages with host country governments?

As the most watched sporting event in the world, the World Cup has a responsibility to adhere to international rights and norms regarding freedom of expression. And with the next World Cup taking place in the United States as well as in Mexico and Canada, as well as the 2023 Women's World Cup set to begin in just over 200 days, we will be watching closely to ensure that the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups are treated with respect.

We look forward to your prompt response and assurances that future FIFA events are inclusive to all.

Sincerely,

An online version of this release is available [here](#).