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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

On December 7, U.S. Magistrate Arthur Latimer approved the addition of two women plaintiffs to the lawsuit against Yale University for sex discrimination by condoning sexual harassment of women students by male faculty and administrators. The two new undergraduate women joined three present students or recent graduates and one faculty member who filed the suit in July, 1977. "Although the suit was already very strong," said Anne Simon, attorney for the plaintiffs, "the presence of these two women broadens the range of facts brought before the court." One of the new plaintiffs had complained to Yale officials immediately after the sexual incident, to no avail. One was given a low grade in a course; one was not granted an athletic letter for managing a varsity team. Supporters of the case noted the fact that the plaintiffs now include a black woman and one woman sexually harassed by an athletic coach, raising two crucial dimensions of the problem which had not previously been represented.

The next developments in the case should come soon in two new judicial decisions. The first must resolve the request by the NOW (National Organization for Women) Legal Defense and Education Fund and the WEAL Fund for admission of their amicus curiae brief in support of the plaintiffs' view that a private lawsuit may be brought under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits sex discrimination in educational programs receiving federal funds.

The other judicial decision will resolve Yale's motion to dismiss, in which they argue that the plaintiffs' complaint is inadequate to ground a legal claim under Title IX. The plaintiffs argue that the lack of an adequate grievance mechanism effectively condones the imposition of sexual pressures on women students, which in turn deprives them of equal access to the benefits of a Yale education - access which male students enjoy free of comparable sexual demands. Yale's out of court position has been that its current grievance procedures are fully adequate to the problem - if, indeed, there is a problem at all. "The circumstances of the two new plaintiffs give additional insight into the inadequacies of Yale's current practices," noted Harriet Dichter, a member of the Yale Undergraduate Women's Caucus.

Women's athletics is a particularly sensitive subject for Yale women, who recently complained to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare about unequal funding and facilities. Athletics has always been important in the development of women's self-confidence and physical self respect. As Emily Howe, president of the Yale Athletic Association, observed, "To be sexually harassed by a coach can be devastating to women who are striving to overcome learned physical inferiority and to become a part of the athletic community."

"Black women have always been sexually harassed, have often protested it, and have been ignored even more thoroughly than white women," said plaintiff Pamela Price. "For a white man to sexually harass a black woman can be a sexist way of expressing his racism," she continued. Abbe Smith, head of the Yale Undergraduate Caucus Grievance Committee, commented,

"We hope that the courage of this black woman will encourage others, who may feel that women's issues have been defined in terms of the experiences of white women, to join this fight."

Plaintiff Lisa Stone spoke for the plaintiffs and all concerned in expressing the hope that Yale would understand the need to settle for an adequate grievance procedure soon. "It seems so obvious," she said, "and so much more sensible than a lengthy and expensive trial, which would only get more and more embarrassing to Yale."

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Yale Undergraduate Women's Caucus
Grievance Committee

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