



Inquiry re Religious Expression and Potential Discrimination in Major League Baseball

July 8, 2026

Robert D. Manfred, Jr.
Commissioner
Major League Baseball
1271 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

Dear Commissioner Manfred,

We write to you in our individual capacities as Commissioners of the United States Commission on Civil Rights. We are concerned about reports of actions by Major League Baseball (MLB) and at least one of its teams that appear to disfavor religious expression—particularly Christian faith—while simultaneously promoting other social and political messages.

On June 12, 2026, during the San Francisco Giants’ “Pride Night” game, pitchers Landen Roupp, JT Brubaker, and Ryan Walker wrote references to Genesis 9:12-16 on their team-issued rainbow-themed caps. This biblical passage describes God’s covenant with Noah and humanity, symbolized by the rainbow. MLB issued formal warnings to the players, citing uniform regulations that generally prohibit writing or markings on apparel. MLB has described this as content-neutral enforcement.

Separately, on May 26, 2026, an undercover investigation revealed statements by a former Washington Nationals executive indicating that Catholic pitcher Trevor Williams was excluded from certain team promotional materials because of his public expression of faith, including criticism of groups perceived as mocking Catholic traditions. The executive was terminated following the report, but the underlying concerns about viewpoint-based exclusion persist.

Yet other ideological and political messages have in fact appeared on uniforms. These instances involved messages only endorsed by MLB. Examples include 2020 displays of “Black Lives Matter” patches, “United for Change” initiatives, and player-customized cleats bearing progressive political slogans.

It seems that employees were told they had to display speech with which they disagree and that conflicts with their religious beliefs, while they are prohibited from displaying religious speech of their own.

These incidents raise questions under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. That law prohibits employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of religion in hiring, firing, compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment. This includes failing to

reasonably accommodate sincerely held religious beliefs and practices unless doing so would impose an undue hardship (defined as a substantial burden in the overall context of the employer's business). MLB and its member teams, as employers of players and staff, are subject to these obligations.

Although private employers like MLB are afforded wide latitude to enforce uniform policies, selective or inconsistent application can constitute unlawful religious discrimination or retaliation. Religious Americans, including Christians and Catholics, are entitled to the full protections of federal civil rights law in their workplaces, including professional sports.

To better understand these matters, we respectfully request that MLB provide the following information:

1. The full text of the current MLB Uniform Regulations (and any related internal guidance or enforcement memos) concerning markings, writings, symbols, or personal expressions on player apparel, equipment, and themed promotional items, including any exceptions or discretionary approvals.
2. A list of all instances since 2020 in which MLB or any team has warned, fined, disciplined, or otherwise addressed players or staff for uniform markings or expressions. For each, please include: the date, team, individual(s) involved, the content or nature of the marking/message, the action taken, and any rationale provided.
3. Any policies, directives, training materials, or practices (formal or informal) regarding the inclusion or exclusion of players from team media, promotions, or public-facing activities based on their religious beliefs, expressions, or affiliations.
4. Details on Pride Night and similar themed events: policies governing player participation in wearing themed apparel; any expectations, incentives, or consequences (explicit or implicit) for participation or non-participation; and records of accommodations requested or granted for religious or other objections.
5. Communications with partner affiliates for Pride Night, including discussions with them about player opposition or display of alternative messages.
6. Documentation of all league approvals, relaxations of rules, or directives related to 2020 social justice messaging (e.g., BLM patches, mound stenciling, cleat slogans) and any comparable initiatives, including criteria used for approval versus rejection of other messages.
7. Any internal analyses, complaints, or investigations related to religious discrimination, accommodation requests, or viewpoint diversity within MLB teams.

Finally, after reviewing your response to Senator Hawley's June 16, 2026 letter on this topic, we seek complete answers to the following questions:

1. What specific criteria govern MLB's discretion to "grandfather" or otherwise permit "exception(s)" to its uniform policy for "celebratory or commemorative days"?

2. Would MLB apply the same criteria to a team's request for a uniform accommodation honoring a religious community within its fanbase as it applied to the Pride-related requests from the Dodgers and Giants? If not, why not?

To comply with core civil rights principles and longstanding federal law, MLB must ensure that all players—regardless of their religious or political beliefs—can participate fully without fear of disparate treatment. Accordingly, we stand ready to engage constructively and look forward to your timely and complete response.

Please direct responses to Thomas H. Bickel at tbickel@usccr.gov.

Sincerely,

Commissioner J. Christian Adams

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Commissioner Stephen Gilchrist

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Gilchrist". The signature is bold and cursive, with a large initial "S".

Commissioner Peter N. Kirsanow

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter N. Kirsanow". The signature is bold and cursive, with a large initial "P".