



Statement of
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United States Olympic Committee

before the
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate

hearing on
Protecting Young Athletes from Sexual Abuse
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Good morning Chairman Grassley, Senator Feinstein, and members of the Committee. I am Rick Adams, and I serve as the Chief of Paralympic Sport and National Governing Body Organizational Development for the United States Olympic Committee. My responsibilities include the Olympic Committee's oversight and management of our SafeSport initiative. SafeSport is the term that we use for our ongoing efforts to strengthen the Olympic and Paralympic communities' response to issues related to sexual and other abuse of athletes, including young athletes.

The stories of abuse that we have heard today and elsewhere are appalling, disheartening, and unacceptable. The Olympic community failed the people it was supposed to protect. The U.S. Olympic Committee leads the diverse network of Olympic sports organizations in the United States, and we must therefore take responsibility for its failures. We do take responsibility, and we apologize to any young athlete who has ever faced abuse.

We recognize the difficulty of stepping forward to share your stories, and it is our obligation to build on your courage and bravery to make real and lasting changes. That includes changes to our policies and protocols, and also changes to the environment that discouraged victims from reporting abuse. We must look for ways to improve protections for young athletes, and we are grateful for this Committee's interest in being a leader in that effort.

The U.S. Olympic Committee recently reached an important milestone in our effort to protect athletes with the launch of the U.S. Center for SafeSport at the beginning of this month. The launch of the Center is the most recent step in our seven-year effort to implement reforms directed at preventing sexual and other abuse of youth athletes in the Olympic community.

The Center for SafeSport will be responsible for investigating and resolving allegations of sexual abuse associated with the National Governing Bodies, which are the 47 independent entities recognized by the U.S. Olympic Committee to manage the training and development in each Olympic or Pan American sport. The Center's activities will be guided by a SafeSport Code, which I have appended to my testimony, that covers everything from harassment and hazing to physical and sexual misconduct.

The U.S. Olympic Committee requires each National Governing Body to participate in the Center for SafeSport as a condition of being recognized by the U.S. Olympic Committee. Now that the Center is open – and the U.S. Olympic Committee's policies and procedures related to the Center are now effective – the governing bodies are in the process of amending their individual bylaws to require allegations of abuse to be reported to the Center. We anticipate that all National Governing Bodies will complete this process in the coming weeks. Many have already completed the process and are now obligated and prepared to send allegations of abuse to the Center.

The U.S. Olympic Committee's regular and periodic audits of the independent National Governing Bodies include auditing of the organizations' compliance with the requirements of SafeSport. Additionally, we are announcing today that we are in the process of selecting an independent auditor to conduct a unique one-time audit of all National Governing Bodies and the Committee itself to ensure that the new SafeSport requirements have been fully implemented across the Olympic and Paralympic community.

The approach that we have taken with the Center for SafeSport is similar to the approach that we previously adopted in establishing the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency in 1999. The U.S. Anti-Doping Agency has been very successful at concentrating expertise and ensuring independence in investigations of doping issues. By following this model in the creation of the U.S. Center for SafeSport, we will also bring expertise and independence to our efforts to prevent abuse of youth athletes.

We strongly support S. 534, the Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse Act, which was introduced by the Chairman, the Ranking Member, and a number of additional Senators a few weeks ago, and the goals that it advances. The key provisions of the bill require National Governing Bodies and their personnel to report suspected incidents of child abuse and sexual abuse to law enforcement. This requirement complements the rules that the U.S. Olympic Committee established in the SafeSport program. It is important to us that this legislation complements our efforts and permits us to continue to implement the structural reforms we have adopted.

Specifically, under section 8.7(l) of the U.S. Olympic Committee's bylaws, each National Governing Body must comply with the Committee's policies related to SafeSport and, additionally, the policies and procedures of the U.S. Center for SafeSport. These provisions require all National Governing Bodies and their personnel to report suspected sexual abuse to the Center and to law enforcement. The Center has exclusive authority within the Olympic community to investigate and resolve violations involving sexual misconduct. Additionally, the Center has discretionary authority to assume responsibility for the investigation and resolution of

other violations of the Code; if not exercised, the applicable governing body retains the authority and obligation to investigate and resolve the allegation.

In addition to the Code, the U.S. Center for SafeSport has adopted practices and procedures and procedural rules for arbitration that govern its investigation and resolution of alleged violations. These important procedural improvements centralize and clarify the process by which allegations of abuse are investigated and resolved. By adopting clear procedures that apply to all investigations by the Center, we seek to ensure a fair process that permits swift actions to protect children.

Mr. Chairman and Senator Feinstein, we appreciate your leadership in this area. A single instance of child or sexual abuse is one too many. With the launch of the U.S. Center for SafeSport, we have dramatically reformed and improved the Olympic and Paralympic communities' ability to prevent abuse and strengthened the protections that we can jointly achieve for young athletes.

U.S. Olympic Committee and National Governing Bodies

The U.S. Olympic Committee was founded in 1894. It serves as both the National Olympic Committee and National Paralympic Committee for the United States. The Olympic Committee is responsible for the training and funding of U.S. teams for the Olympic, Paralympic, Youth Olympic, Pan American, and Parapan American Games, and serving as a steward of the Olympic movement throughout the country.

In 1978, the Amateur Sports Act (now called the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act) appointed the U.S. Olympic Committee as the coordinating body for all Olympic athletic activity in the United States. Pursuant to the statute, the U.S. Olympic Committee supports athletes through funding, health insurance, tuition grants, marketing opportunities, and career services. The Committee supports the Olympic Training Centers and Olympic Training Sites for athletic training, conditioning, sports medicine, and nutrition assistance. The Committee also oversees the process by which U.S. cities bid to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Youth Olympic Games, and the Pan/Parapan American Games.

The Ted Stevens Act also authorizes the U.S. Olympic Committee to recognize a National Governing Body for any sport that is included in the various Olympic Games. The Olympic Committee may recognize only one such governing body for each sport (except as it may relate to the Paralympics). Once selected, that organization takes on a number of obligations related to amateur athletic activity in that sport in the United States, including sanctioning and conducting competitions, and recommending teams to represent the United States in the Olympic Games. The National Governing Bodies also oversee the training and development of athletes in their respective sports.

Today, there are 47 organizations that have been recognized by the U.S. Olympic Committee as National Governing Bodies. There is a large degree of variation among these 47 independent organizations. For example, U.S. Soccer manages national soccer activities that range from local recreational soccer programs for children to the U.S. National Men's and Women's soccer teams. These diverse soccer programs include thousands of coaches and officials and hundreds of

thousands of athletes. Olympic activity, therefore, is a small part of U.S. Soccer's focus and activities. Conversely, USA Pentathlon is a smaller organization and Olympic activities are a primary focus of the organization.

Because each National Governing Body is the primary organization that manages and oversees the activities of coaches and athletes, each organization has its own rules and procedures related to athletes and coaches. On key areas of governance, however, the U.S. Olympic Committee uses its designation authority under the Ted Stevens Act to require each National Governing Body to adopt certain standards. And in challenging areas that affect the entire Olympic community, we have gone even further to establish entities that are independent of any individual National Governing Body and dedicated to addressing specific challenging topics. This is the approach that we took in response to doping issues in the late 1990s, and it is the approach we are taking with the U.S. Center for SafeSport today.

U.S. Center for SafeSport

The U.S. Olympic Committee has long worked with the National Governing Bodies on efforts to protect youth athletes from sexual and other abuses. In 2010, the Committee determined that the issue warranted renewed attention following public reports of sexual abuse cases concerning swimmers. The Committee convened a working group to study the problem and make specific recommendations for improvements to the U.S. Olympic Committee board. Nina Kemppel, a four-time Olympic skier and current board member of the U.S. Olympic Committee, chaired the working group. The working group produced six comprehensive recommendations for action by the U.S. Olympic Committee: Increase its leadership role; lead by example; develop training materials; develop resources for use by local clubs and organizations; standardize services that promote safe training environments; and encourage National Governing Bodies to adopt policies to address sexual and physical misconduct.

Since then, the U.S. Olympic Committee has implemented each of the working group's recommendations. As it was implementing the working group's recommendations, the U.S. Olympic Committee concluded that the Olympic sports program would benefit from an independent entity dedicated to protecting youth athletes' safety. In June 2014, the Committee's board approved the creation of an independent SafeSport entity and began the process of establishing the U.S. Center for SafeSport. In September 2015, the Committee established the Center's nominating and governance committee. In January 2016, the first board of the Center was seated and held its first meeting. In June 2016, the Committee's board approved the launch of the Center. In November 2016, the Center selected its first chief executive officer, Shellie Pfohl, who previously served as the executive director of the President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition. In March 2017, the Center officially opened.

USA Gymnastics

Finally, Mr. Chairman and Senator Feinstein, I would like to take a moment to discuss the very serious issues that have been brought to light concerning USA Gymnastics. We share your deep concerns about USA Gymnastics' handling of allegations of abuse, and we supported Steve Penny's decision to resign. We hope that his resignation will offer an opportunity for the organization to implement significant change. The abuse should have been detected, it should

have been prevented, and it should have been promptly reported. The Olympic community failed and must do better.

The Center for SafeSport seeks to address one of the issues that this case highlights: The barriers and disincentives that victims may face when seeking to report abuse. The Center creates an independent path for reporting and an independent system for investigating and resolving cases of sexual abuse. With the Center, we have created a system that removes the investigation and resolution of allegations of sexual abuse from the control of any National Governing Body, including USA Gymnastics, and a resource dedicated to education and awareness of the importance of reporting abuse. We believe that these changes will significantly improve the protection of youth athletes from sexual and other abuses.

Our work in this area will never be done. We must continue to look for ways to protect our young athletes. We will be open to new ideas and approaches. We will continue to look for additional ways to strengthen protections, including supporting your important legislation to require National Governing Bodies and associated personnel to report allegations of abuse.

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Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today, and I would be happy to answer your questions.