

Statement by Jamie Dantzcher to the United States Senate Judiciary Committee, March 28, 2017

Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Feinstein, distinguished members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today.

I fell in love with gymnastics just before I turned 3-years-old and watched Mary Lou Retton on TV in the 1984 Olympics. Although my parents were competitive athletes growing up, they didn't know much about gymnastics besides watching it every 4 years in the Summer Olympics. I played T-ball and tried other sports but I never stopped asking them to let me learn gymnastics. I wanted to be an Olympian. I remember taking all the cushions off the couch to use as mats and I would try to teach myself flips.

After years of rearranging their household furniture and using it as landing pads, my parents finally put me in gymnastics when I was 7 1/2 years old. I loved it more than I even imagined I would. I love to tumble and swing on bars. I felt like I was flying.

I would try anything to be like the Olympians I saw on TV, I would wear my hair like them, dress like them, try to walk and stand like them, and I would practice my Olympic salute over and over and over. My parents had to beg me to leave the gym after practice every time because I couldn't get enough of it. Gymnastics brought me so much joy when I was a little girl.

When I was 11 years old, I started training as an elite gymnast, at a gym in West Covina, California. I needed to work with more experienced coaches. This was a big sacrifice for my entire family because it was a 90-minute drive each direction from home. My parents both had to work 5-6 days a week and had six other kids that were all involved in sports as well. My coaches told them they believed the sacrifice would be worth it because I had the talent to go really far. Financially my parents didn't know how they would make it all work, but they decided that it was worth the effort in hopes that I would have the opportunity to get a college scholarship one day.

Gymnastics started becoming very intense at this point. I started training 25-30 hours per week including two workouts per day during the summer. My coaches were very serious and even scary at times when they would yell at me.

My body was always sore and I always seemed to be tired, but I was learning new skills that I had only seen on TV before so I thought that's just the way it had to be to accomplish my dream.

I made the USA Junior National Team for the first time when I was just 12 years old. It was in Palm Springs, California. What I remember most about that meet was that Kerri Strug was competing as a senior. I competed at the same meet with so many girls I had seen on TV! I was so excited! I made the USA National Team every year after that all the way up to the Olympics.

It was then that I was introduced to the US National Team Physician, Dr. Larry Nassar.

What I have only recently come to understand is that the medical treatment he performed for my back pain and other injuries was sexual assault. Dr. Nassar abused me at the USA National Training Center in Texas, he abused me in California and at meets all over the world. Worst, he abused me in my hotel room in Sydney at the Olympic Games.

When I first spoke out about my abuse at the hands of Dr. Nassar, I thought I was the only one. I was disbelieved and even criticized by the some in the Gymnastics community for bringing this disturbing issue to light.

Now I know that I am not alone. More than 100 women have come forward and shared stories that are shockingly similar to mine.

Children often don't speak up when they are abused. They suffer in silence. They are taught to submit to the authority of adults. This is especially true in the hyper-competitive world of elite gymnastics. Women do speak up and that is why I am here today.

USA Gymnastics failed its most basic responsibility to protect the athletes under its care. They failed to take action against coaches, trainers, and other adults who abused children. And they allowed Dr. Nassar to abuse young women and girls for more than 20 years.

The federal law that governs our Olympic program traditionally defines the responsibilities of USA Gymnastics. That law should now specify that USA

Gymnastics must abide by stricter policies to prevent sexual abuse in order for it to maintain its certification.

It is time the law reflects that USA Gymnastics' highest priority should be protecting their athletes from sexual abuse by male coaches and doctors and that is exactly what USA Gymnastics failed to prevent.

I am grateful to this Committee for inviting me to add my voice to those who are supporting this important new legislation. It will require USA Gymnastics and other Olympic sports organizations to immediately report child abuse to law enforcement authorities and will provide victims with greater opportunities to seek justice.

Generations of young athletes will thank you for your leadership. So do I.