

Prepared Statement by U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee

Hearing titled: Dereliction of Duty: Examining the Inspector General's Report on the FBI's handling of the
Larry Nassar Investigation
Wednesday, September 15, 2021

[VIDEO](#)

Thank you, Chairman Durbin for working with me on today's hearing. As the former chairman of this Committee, I convened a hearing in 2017 on the importance of protecting young athletes against abuse. It took place before Larry Nassar, the now disgraced team doctor for USA Gymnastics, was convicted.

Our Committee heard then from other gymnasts about a culture in competitive sports that made it difficult for many girls to come forward and report sexual abuse. That hearing convinced me of the need to champion legislation, on which I worked closely with Senator Feinstein in 2017. Its enactment means that coaches, instructors and others who work with young athletes now are mandatory reporters of child exploitation or abuse.

Because oversight of the FBI is one of our Committee's important duties, I also repeatedly pressed the FBI for more information on its handling of the Nassar investigation from 2017 to the present. FBI personnel ignored my staff's request in January 2018 for a briefing, and when I contacted the Bureau by letter to restate the request, I was advised that the Inspector General was reviewing the matter.

The Bureau, while one of our premier law enforcement agencies, has stumbled in several ways in recent years. In a recent example, an Associated Press investigation identified half a dozen sexual misconduct allegations involving senior FBI personnel over the past five years with each of the accused officials avoiding discipline. Another shocking example came to light this summer, when the Inspector General completed his report on the handling of sexual abuse allegations against the former team doctor for USA Gymnastics. It was then that we learned that the FBI severely let down dozens of teenage girls, several of whom bravely came forward in 2015 to report their abuse. Children suffered needlessly because multiple agents in multiple offices at the FBI neglected to share the Nassar allegations with their law enforcement counterparts at state and local agencies. Disturbingly, the abuse occurred at the hands of someone who was entrusted with their medical treatment and well-being. Brave survivors, now poised young women, are with us today, and I welcome them to the Committee.

The FBI, in its July 13th response to the Inspector General's report, attributes this episode to a few agents at FBI field offices who neglected to carry out their duties properly. I suspect there's much more to the story.

One issue is that the FBI has a division in Washington, D.C., known as the Violent Crimes Against Children Unit. This component of headquarters was notified by two of its field offices about the Nassar allegations in 2015 and 2016, respectively. The children's unit employs subject matter experts, so it is well positioned to guide FBI field offices on their duties in child exploitation cases. Because it's housed at headquarters, this children's unit also was uniquely positioned to play a coordinating role, by supervising case transfers to the appropriate FBI field offices. And this unit was well positioned to offer qualitative

supervision of field offices' work, for example by ensuring that follow-up occurs in sensitive cases. Tragically, it's obvious these things did not happen.

The Bureau, including this children's unit, also placed publicity and its image before victims' protection in this case. The children's unit helped develop a white paper, or more accurately, a "whitewash," after the Nassar case attracted national attention. Ensuring that truthful information was provided about the FBI's role in this investigation was clearly not the main priority. This is a serious problem at the heart of the FBI, not a case of a few errant agents.

At today's hearing, I hope to hear more about exactly who at FBI headquarters, other than its children's unit, knew about the Nassar allegations, how and when they learned of these allegations, and what they did in response.

If there's one thing the Inspector General's report illustrates, it's this: we need to make sure the Bureau is both more effective and held more accountable. This episode is unfortunate too, because, as I've said repeatedly, there are many extremely fine men and women in the Bureau, and many who serve their country well as FBI employees.

I look forward to hearing from the young women who were the first to bravely come forward and share their experiences of abuse. I also hope to hear from our government witnesses on how to improve the FBI's approach in child exploitation cases and how to ensure negligent agents are held accountable. Finally, I wanted to mention that I am working on legislation to close the legislative loophole in the sex tourism statute that the Inspector General flagged in his report. This gap in the law allowed Larry Nassar to evade federal prosecution for assaulting children while traveling abroad, and that can never happen again. I look forward to working with the Inspector General and members of this committee on making this necessary change. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

