



COMMITTEE ON
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DEMOCRATS
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Pallone Remarks at Hearing on Sexual Abuse in Olympic Sports

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations hearing on “Examining the Olympic Community’s Ability to Protect Athletes from Sexual Abuse:”*

Today leaders of the Olympic community will tell us that they failed the people they were supposed to protect. We must examine those failures, and understand whether the organizations before us today have learned from them.

Reports of sexual abuse in organized sports have been in the press for decades – years before the world learned of Larry Nassar’s horrific crimes. It is shameful that many organizations share the blame for failing these survivors.

The problem of sexual abuse in organized sports is bigger than Larry Nassar, and it is bigger than any single organization. Today we will hear from the National Governing Bodies of several sports. Each one has had to address sexual abuse of their athletes.

Unfortunately, we have seen that these cases are not rare. Too many athletes have come forward with accounts of abuse. These athletes come from different sports, but often we hear the same themes when we listen to them. Frequently their abusers held positions of power – sometimes controlling whether an athlete could train or compete. And frequently their abusers had powerful friends in their respective organizations.

Up until recently, each sports’ governing body addressed sexual abuse allegations internally.

That system failed to protect athletes.

There was a great need for an independent organization. Last March, the U.S. Center for SafeSport opened its doors, with a mission to prevent abuse and foster a culture of safety in sports. Now sports governing bodies can – and must – report allegations of sexual misconduct to the Center for SafeSport.

The Center continues to receive new cases, as well as cases from athletes who had reported sexual misconduct in the past. On top of that, it offers education and training for sports governing bodies and athletes. Already, the organization has provided training to more than 300,000 people, and has received more than 500 reports.

Clearly, all of this takes resources, and we need to make sure the Center for SafeSport has the resources and personnel it needs to do its work.

I also want to hear what the U.S. Olympic Committee is doing to support the Center for SafeSport. Special language in the Tax Code designates the U.S. Olympic Committee a tax-exempt non-profit organization. But few nonprofit organizations can report revenues in the hundreds of millions of dollars, as the U.S. Olympic Committee did in its most recent tax filing.

The U.S. Center for SafeSport gets its funding from diverse sources, including fundraising and government grants. It also gets a portion of its funding from the U.S. Olympic Committee.

I hope we will hear today that the U.S. Olympic Committee and the sports' governing bodies are prepared to provide consistent and continuing support to the Center for SafeSport. It is critical for the Center for SafeSport to have a permanent and dedicated source of funding, and these sports' organizations should make sure that happens.

I also hope we will hear that the U.S. Olympic Committee will use its position of leadership and authority to require sports governing bodies to adopt reforms as needed to reduce the risk of harm to athletes.

For example, questions such as who is subject to background checks, how those checks are done, and whether lists of individuals banned from a sport are made public are all important safety standards that should be applied consistently across all sports.

I also want to hear that the Center for SafeSport, the Olympic Committee, and all governing bodies are committed to completing ongoing formal assessments and evaluations to determine what is working, and what needs additional improvement or additional resources.

Before we leave today, I want to hear from all of our witnesses about the reforms they have implemented to keep athletes safe. I want you to convince me that you are thoroughly examining how you failed athletes in the past, and that those lessons are shaping the reforms you are putting in place.

I need to be convinced that you are building a system – with the right people, structure, and resources – to protect athletes under your leadership. I also want to hear that there will be zero tolerance for the kinds of abuses that brought us here today.

Thank you, and I yield back.

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