

STATEMENT OF

**CRAIG CRESS
CEO, USA SOFTBALL**

BEFORE THE

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & COMMERCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATION**

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**TIMEOUT: EVALUATING SAFETY MEASURES IMPLEMENTED TO PROTECT
ATHLETES**

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Testimony of Craig A. Cress, CEO of USA Softball

Good morning, Chair Griffith, Vice Chair Lesko, Ranking Member Castor, and Members of the Subcommittee. USA Softball greatly appreciates this Congressional Committee for listening and working with all parties to further advance the fundamental purpose of Amateur Sports Act and the U.S. Center for SafeSport to better protect athletes from potential harm.

Summary of Major Points

- SafeSport is a valuable tool for athletes' safety.
- USA Softball is a standard bearer for background checks and coach/umpire education predating SafeSport act.
- All minor age participants deserve protection, yet hundreds of thousands are currently unprotected.

- Other non-NGB youth sports organizations actively target National Governing Bodies (NGBs) by promoting that they are exempt from SafeSport requirements.
- Help protect all athletes by creating a level playing field where all youth athletes are afforded the protection that they deserve, and NGB's are not at a competitive disadvantage with grassroots sports.

The U.S. Center for SafeSport was created for the needed purpose of developing policies and procedures to better protect athletes and better provide a safe environment for participants. Please know that long before the U.S. Center for SafeSport and any national scandals or State-law mandates, my organization – USA Softball – was an early-adopter of criminal background checks and educational programs for coaches of our youth athletes. USA Softball has also maintained a decades-old disciplinary process to remove wrongdoers from participation in its activities. It is, in part, because of this tradition within my organization that we believe the U.S. Center for SafeSport has an extremely important purpose and has taken on a monumental task. Upon the creation of the SafeSport Center, the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) and the National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of Sports were asked to assist in providing funding to the Center. The NGBs completely understand and support that all adults participating in youth sport as an administrator, coach, or official should be regularly educated as well as provide an up-to-date background check. The responsibility for these adults following these requirements falls to the NGBs and is audited by the US Center for SafeSport for compliance. USA Softball has been working within this framework and under the U.S. Center for SafeSport for the past several years.

However, there seems to be an assumption that, by regulating the NGBs, **all** youth sports participants are covered and protected; however, that is an incorrect assumption. In just our sport of softball, there are at least 25 other organizations that are conducting softball events that are not obligated to meet SafeSport requirements or adhere to SafeSport policies, including the Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies. This means that there are **hundreds of thousands** of youths participating in play where the adults are not SafeSport-educated and potentially not had any background check screening in just the sport of softball alone. Those athletes are as equally important and equally deserving of protection as the athletes participating in USA Softball programs – yet they are not receiving the benefit of those policies and procedures.

It is a present-day reality that other national and regional sports organizations that are not NGBs are not required to follow U.S. Center for SafeSport educational and other requirements. This is not only without justification for the benefit of the participants, but it has also created an issue for the NGBs.

In recent years, we have seen individuals move their programs and tournaments away from our NGB so that such vitally important policies and procedures no longer apply to their programs. This is not a good development for the participants. These other organizations, both national and regional, are not being held to the same standards for participation – and not affording their athletes the benefit of the policies and procedures of the U.S. Center for SafeSport. By way of example, USA Softball has had individuals

leave our organization recently and have formed their own softball associations while publicly advertising on their websites that SafeSport is not required for teams, coaches, or umpires to participate in their new organizations. USA Softball, like other NGBs, feel that all youth participants should have the same type of protection when participating across all youth sports organizations and USA Softball believes that this loophole should be closed so that athletes are provided the benefit of the U.S. Center for SafeSport and its policies.

USA Softball and other NGBs are asking for the playing field to be leveled and that all organizations that are offering opportunities for youth to play any sports be required to have their administrators, coaches and officials become SafeSport educated and audited for these practices just like the NGBs that are offering grassroots programming. The purpose of these policies is to protect athletes from abuse. I believe this additional step would further protect athletes and be an overall benefit to recreational sports.