
TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE THE

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

TIMEOUT: EVALUATING SAFETY MEASURES TO PROTECT ATHLETES

OCTOBER 18, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Griffith, for inviting the U.S. Center for SafeSport (the Center) to participate in this hearing and providing me the opportunity to discuss the impact we've had on the Olympic & Paralympic Movement. I'm pleased to be able to share the progress we've made in changing sport culture.

When the Center opened our doors six years ago, we were faced with a daunting task – to undo years of inaction, restore faith in a movement that had failed far too many, and finally hold abusers, and the organizations who enabled them, accountable.

In the six years since we started this work, the Center has seen true progress toward culture change:

- Since 2017, reports of abuse and misconduct made to the Center increased by nearly 2000%. Individuals are coming forward because they know the Center is a resource.
- The names of more than 2,000 individuals are now listed on our Centralized Disciplinary Database (CDD). It is a first-of-its-kind public resource listing individuals who have been restricted or banned from sport, which any parent, local sports league, youth-serving organization, or employer can easily access on the Center's website.
- We've delivered 4.5 million trainings to more than two million Participants in the Movement to prepare the sport community to recognize, prevent, and respond to abuse and misconduct.
- The Center has also developed comprehensive safety policies, and has audited every single NGB to drive compliance. Something that had never been done before we opened.

It has been a long and sometimes bumpy road. There were no instructions or blueprints on how to begin this work. There was simply a strong mission, and an even stronger will to show up for America's athletes.

I'll admit, there were mistakes made. But there were also lessons learned.

We know that there are participants in our Response and Resolution process who felt it was not trauma-informed, there was poor communication, or it simply took too long. To them I say: We are working every day

to make athlete safety a priority, and I am deeply committed to continuous improvement. My team is deeply committed to continuous improvement.

Just as we're driving accountability throughout sport, we are also holding ourselves accountable.

We have begun to seek feedback from participants in our process and have pledged to make improvements based on what we learn. We have ongoing trauma-informed training for our team and have dedicated staff and resources to help participants understand our process. We've met with soccer players who expressed their concerns in a July letter to Congress, and are seeking additional input from athletes, survivors, and NGBs as we conduct a thorough review of our processes, including the use of administrative closure, the duration of investigations, and communications with parties, to ensure fairness, timeliness, and trauma sensitivity. We are also keenly focused on soliciting additional resources to grow our investigative staff. We intend to release the results of our review publicly next year.

But while we are looking ahead, we will not forget the long road behind us. A road where toxic sport culture quietly festered, where allegations were swept under the rug, and where countless individuals suffered abuse in silence without avenues for recourse.

There are some, seated at this table, that want us to go backward. They would have you believe that allowing NGBs to investigate allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct will better serve athletes. It simply isn't true.

Congress saw fit to remove this power from NGBs six years ago – and it was the right decision. NGBs did not then, nor do they now, have the capacity, the expertise, or the resources to effectively or independently resolve allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct.

The Center is not perfect, but our process is working. Athletes are coming forward with their stories, because they finally can. We are building awareness and trust with them, and demanding accountability.

Just last week, a federal judge in Portland, Oregon sentenced Olympic Equestrian Rich Fellers to 50 months in prison for felony sexual abuse against a minor. The Center's initial report and ongoing collaboration with law enforcement were the catalyst for his conviction. Thanks to the strength and courage of the claimant in our process, the Center was able to provide critical information to law enforcement. During the yearslong criminal investigation and trial, the Center listed Fellers as ineligible to participate in sport on the Centralized Disciplinary Database.

Fellers' conviction is just one example of the critical role the Center plays in safeguarding athletes and holding abusers accountable. And there are many, many more.

Thank you, and I welcome your questions.