

As you all know, this Subcommittee had originally planned to hold this hearing last October. I am grateful we were able to reschedule this important hearing and appreciate the witnesses returning and thank them for their flexibility and understanding.

Organized athletics, especially for our children, is invaluable to the culture of our country. Sport is instrumental in helping to teach young people the values of teamwork and self-esteem.

From soccer to football, tennis to badminton, lacrosse and swimming, over 60 million children participate in youth sports leagues.¹

Some children start their athletic journey before they go to kindergarten.² They pour their hearts and souls into it, dedicating countless hours in the pursuit of mastering their chosen sport.

A young athlete hoping to excel at the highest levels as part of the modern Olympic Movement may have to put in the same training hours a week as the average American does at work.

It is because of these fierce competitors and the extensive network of youth leagues that the United States proudly claims the most Olympic medals at over 3,100. 1,100 more than the Germans, who comes in a distant second, with 2,000 medals.³

With this tremendous sport success our country enjoys, we owe it to the athletes to ensure that they can compete in a safe, and abuse-free, environment.

Unfortunately, this is not necessarily the case. As a Member of this Subcommittee in 2018, I remember listening to testimony about the tragic and horrific episodes of sexual abuse documented at USA Gymnastics. This repugnant occurrence was perhaps the worst case of athletic abuse ever seen in the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement.

¹ Peter D. Fabricant, *Intensive Participation in a Single Sport: Is it Good or Bad for Kids?* Hospital for Special Surgery (July 25, 2022) (“In fact, of the 60 million children and teens who participate in organized sports each year...”) https://www.hss.edu/article_should-kids-play-competitive-sports.asp

² 5 things to know about alpine skier Mikaela Shiffrin, 4Washington (“American skier Mikaela Shiffrin started skiing when she was 2 years old in her family's driveway.”) <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/sports/beijing-winter-olympics/5-things-to-know-about-alpine-skier-mikaela-shiffrin/2965828/>

³ Clare Mulroy, *This country has won more than twice as many Olympic medals as any other nation*, USA Today (May 10, 2023) (USA: 3105, German: 1,211) <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/2023/05/10/which-country-has-most-olympic-medals/11414925002/>

Congress came together following that incident to charter the U.S. Center for SafeSport to ensure those abhorrent events never happen again.

The Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit responsible for investigating and resolving abuse and misconduct reports in sports leagues affiliated with U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee.

Currently, SafeSport covers about 11 million individuals.⁴

The Center has a tall order, but it is critical that we have a functioning, transparent and effective organization that seriously takes on its mission to protect athletes from abuse.

SafeSport has a challenging role to play in protecting children against abuse. Like any new organization, it will need to grow and rectify any mistakes that occur.

As SafeSport learns and builds up its protocols, it may also need legislative changes.

I am well aware of the criticisms levied against SafeSport, particularly regarding its lack of transparency.

Just a few weeks ago the Commission on the State of U.S. Olympics and Paralympics, tasked by Congress to find areas to improve the Olympic movement, stated SafeSport made

QUOTE “a decision not to furnish us with requested financial documents detailing spending, as well as those covering certain safety policies, reflect a lack of transparency built into the structure of the current system, one that hinders the movement’s accountability to Congress.”⁵
END QUOTE

⁴ U.S. Center for SafeSport, *About Safe Sport Act*, <https://uscenterforsafesport.org/about/our-story/>

⁵ PASSING THE TORCH, MODERNIZING OLYMPIC, PARALYMPIC, & GRASSROOTS SPORTS IN AMERICA 8 (Commission on the State of the U.S. Olympics and Paralympics) (2024),

I am also concerned about reports my office has received regarding youth sports leagues disaffiliating from their National Governing Bodies to avoid coach training and background check requirements imposed by SafeSport.

This is very troubling given that SafeSport was created to protect athletes from abuse and instead it may be inadvertently driving athletes into more opaque leagues that lack the reporting and training requirements of SafeSport.

The Commission interviewed National Governing Body participants who told them QUOTE “a coach can move to unsanctioned competitions...still be participating in the sport basically every single day.” END QUOTE.

One person even told the Commission QUOTE “the two biggest offenders that I know of are still coaching. Nothing’s ever happened to them.” END QUOTE.⁶

We must find a way to close these loopholes.

This oversight hearing is a great bipartisan opportunity to check in with SafeSport and some of the National Governing Bodies regarding how well SafeSport is functioning and how overall athlete safety can be improved.

Everyone in this room is in agreement-- the physical and mental health of our youth athletes is paramount. We owe them that.

⁶ PASSING THE TORCH, MODERNIZING OLYMPIC, PARALYMPIC, & GRASSROOTS SPORTS IN AMERICA 75 (Commission on the State of the U.S. Olympics and Paralympics) 75 (2024),