

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, good evening. My name is Michael Phelps, and I come before you today not just as a retired 5-time Olympic swimmer, but also as an advocate for mental health awareness. The conversation around mental health, especially for athletes, is incomplete without addressing the integrity of sport and fair competition. Representing the United States on the world stage has been one of the greatest honors of my life. Throughout my 15-year career, I have competed in five Olympic Games and six World Championships, winning a combined total of 65 gold medals for Team USA.

My journey in the pool has taught me the values of hard work, dedication, and above all, fairness. It helped me overcome challenges like ADHD and taught me resilience and focus. However, the constant suspicion of doping eroded the mental strength that took a lifetime to build. While competing at the highest levels, I witnessed firsthand the pervasive uncertainty and suspicion surrounding doping, which significantly affected my confidence and that of my fellow athletes. The hardest part was seeing athletes achieve seemingly impossible feats, knowing the immense effort and sacrifices required to reach those heights cleanly. It was disheartening and demoralizing, causing pain and a profound sense of injustice.

I know what it takes to achieve the seemingly impossible the right way. I trained for five-years straight without taking a single day off. I knew that with the level of my competition, an extra 52 practices would be necessary to make the difference. Such sacrifice brought my career to the highest of highs, but also drove me to my lowest of lows. But I did it in the pursuit of standing atop the podium, watching the stars and stripes rise, as the national anthem proudly played.

The last time I spoke to this Committee, in 2017, it was the first time that I had spoken out against doping and for fairness in sport. I testified to the necessity of an athlete being able to believe in themselves to compete at such a high level and know that belief in oneself is only made possible when they believe that the system is clean and fair. With all the sacrifices we make through lifetimes of preparation, perception of unfairness and disbelief in the systems meant to create a level-playing field, eroded away at the Olympic and Paralympic values and the very athletes who need the system to protect them.

After my last testimony, I was truly optimistic that necessary and meaningful reform would be made towards a truly clean and fair international sports playing field. I was gratified that some reforms were put into place at the World Anti-Doping Agency and they finally seemed to react to this Committee's demand for better. But it is incredulous to me to find myself here again today, in front of the same Committee, for basically the same reason seven years later. In fact, if I was to read my testimony from 2017, every word would still ring true. Sitting here once again, it is clear to me that any attempts of reform at WADA have fallen short, and there are still deeply rooted systemic problems that prove detrimental to the integrity of international sports and athletes right to fair competition, time and time again.

For the well-being of athletes, it is crucial that we take the necessary steps to address these issues. I urge Congress to use its considerable leverage with WADA to make the organization independent and effective. It can't reasonably be a coincidence that WADA has yet again succumbed to the pressures of international sport to do the expedient at the expense of the athlete. Close friends were potentially impacted by WADA's failure to follow its own rules in

investigating the nearly two dozen positive tests on Chinese swimmers. Many of them will live with the “what ifs” for the rest of their lives. As athletes, our faith can no longer be blindly placed in the *world* anti-doping agency, an organization that continuously proves that it is either incapable or unwilling to enforce its policies consistently around the *world*.

I will conclude with this. I was once a kid with a dream, and by continuously showing up and putting in the work, I was able to make my dream a reality. But I was only able to do so because I had faith that I was being given a fair shot on the world stage. Swimming changed my life, and I have been working since retirement with my foundation to continue expanding the sport to continue to change the lives of future generations and to show them that they can achieve their dreams too. Now, my swimming career is over. I have moved on to the next chapter of my life as a husband and father. But it is imperative that we keep the book open for those who wish to be next. If the international sports world continues to have its integrity impacted by failures at WADA, the next generation isn't going to be able to have the same belief in the system that I did.

So, with that, I urge you, the members of Congress, to engage in the fight against doping. We can uphold the values of fairness and integrity that are the cornerstone of Olympic and Paralympic sport. Let us work together to ensure that every athlete, regardless of where they come from, has the opportunity to compete fairly and achieve their dreams.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical issue. I am confident that with your support, we can make a difference for the good of all athletes.