



**Statement of Dave Ogreaan, Executive Director of USA Hockey
Before The House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing and Trade**

March 13, 2014

Thank you Chairman Terry, ranking member Schakowsky and distinguished members of the sub-committee. It is a privilege to be here with you today to discuss an issue that is the top priority every day at USA Hockey and that is the safety of our participants – both on and off the ice.

We've adapted well to changing environments over the history of our organization and been fortunate to have had the leadership in the area of safety of our current president, Ron DeGregorio; our chief medical officer, Dr. Michael Stuart from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota; and the chair of our Safety and Protective Committee, Dr. Alan Ashare from St. Elizabeth's Medical Center in Boston, to name just a few.

We began our Safety and Protective Equipment Committee some 40 years ago and it has been an important group to help guide our Board on safety issues ever since. We also have a Risk Management Committee to assist in providing solutions related to

safety of the physical playing environment. In addition, USA Hockey, together with U.S. Figure Skating, started an organization called Serving the American Rinks, or STAR, in 1999. It is essentially a trade organization to assist rinks in all facets of rink operation, including safety issues.

In terms of the safety of our participants, we believe we can positively affect the landscape through three primary areas, 1) education, 2) rules and rules enforcement, and 3) risk management, including equipment and facilities.

Education related to safety happens on an on-going basis at USA Hockey and we utilize many avenues to help communicate with appropriate audiences.

We have direct electronic contact with players, parents, coaches and officials through email and we're in regular communication on a variety of topics with all groups. Our coaches have an enormous influence in creating a safe and responsible environment for our youth players. We've long been credited with having developed the gold-standard coaching education program among youth sports organizations, and we took another step forward with the start of the 2011-12 season by requiring coaches to complete an online education module specific to the age group they're coaching. These modules include not only pertinent development information, but critical safety information, including concussion education. Officials also play an important role in the safety of the game and our officiating education program

includes on-going and regular evaluation and education. Video clips are sent to officials throughout the year to highlight proper rules enforcement and we also have a nationwide reporting system in place to track penalties to help us understand and assess behavior trends of players on the ice.

We also annually mail posters to every rink in the country to help deliver our messaging. Over the years, these posters have focused on topics such as concussion education; rules emphasis; and our *Heads Up, Don't Duck* program to name a few.

I'd like to touch briefly on *Heads Up, Don't Duck*, which was implemented in 1996 thanks to the leadership of Dr. Ashare. *Heads Up, Don't Duck*, which is part of our on-going coaching education curriculum, teaches kids to keep their heads up when they go into the boards or goalpost, with the objective of preventing head and spinal cord injuries. It has been a very important part of our landscape and a program emulated by other sports.

As for rules and rules enforcement, we have modified our rules to adapt to the evolving landscape of the game on an on-going basis, from mouth guard and helmet issues to rules aimed at eliminating dangerous behavior, including our Standard of Play initiative that was launched in 2009-10. Another recent modification USA Hockey made came in June of 2011 when our Board voted to change the allowable

age for checking in games from the Peewee level, which is for players ages 11 and 12, to the Bantam age group, which includes players ages 13 and 14. This was done despite many voices across the country in opposition, but research based on both athlete development and safety guided our Board in making that decision. It is worth noting that two years later, Canada followed our lead.

Related to equipment and its impact on safety, USA Hockey took a significant step in 1978 when it called for the creation of the Hockey Equipment Certification Council. HECC's mission is to seek out, evaluate and select standards and testing procedures for hockey equipment for the purpose of product certification. It is a completely independent body. The HECC certification program validates the manufacturers' certification that the equipment they produce has been tested and meets the requirements of the most appropriate performance standards. It has been an extremely valuable body that has taken its role seriously and has been an important part of the safety story in our sport for over 35 years.

Before closing, I'd like to share with you our off-ice safety program, called USA Hockey SafeSport. We've long had rules in place to protect our participants -- from codes of conduct applicable to administrators, coaches, officials, parents, players and spectators, to policies on hazing, zero tolerance, locker room supervision and abuse of any kind. In addition, in the early 1990s, we were one of the very first youth sports organizations to require screening of adults that have access to our

youth participants. USA Hockey SafeSport, which was approved by our Board in 2012, essentially has taken all of our off-ice safety initiatives and packaged and strengthened them under the brand of USA Hockey Safesport. Today we have a more streamlined reporting system for alleged abuse and protection for whistleblowers. We follow up on 100 percent of the calls we get with reports of alleged abuse of any kind, and our 34 affiliate associations around the country, each with a volunteer SafeSport coordinator, do an excellent job as partners with us in providing the safest possible environment for our participants.

Our sport has enjoyed tremendous growth at all levels – in particular at the youth level – over the course of the last 25 years. Today, hockey is played in all 50 states, with some 350,000 youth players, whereas in 1991, just over 160,000 kids were playing the sport. According to multiple studies, hockey and lacrosse are today the only two youth sports consistently growing in numbers. That growth is due to many factors, including the unsung heroes of our sport, those being the tens of thousands of volunteers across the country that donate their time in many capacities to make grassroots hockey the great option it is for families today. As we continue to provide opportunities for young people to get involved in playing our sport, safety will remain the top priority in our organization.

Thanks again for the invitation to be here today.