



Statement of

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before the

Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, Insurance, and Data Security  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
United States Senate

hearing on

Protecting U.S. Amateur Athletes:  
Examining Abuse Prevention Efforts Across the Olympic Movement

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Good afternoon Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and Senators of the Subcommittee. In 2007, I accepted the position of CEO of the US Bobsled and Skeleton Federation (USBSF), now called USA Bobsled & Skeleton (USABS). I still had fond memories from competing in the 1998 and 2002 Winter Olympic Games in the sport of bobsled, and I was excited to return. But, I also knew it would not be an easy role. There had been a revolving door at the Executive Director level and the organization was being restructured by the USOC due to a series of missteps, including mismanagement of sexual harassment allegations against one of the coaches in 2005.

Those issues had been resolved when I began my CEO role and a new board had been named. We needed to establish a professional, performance-based culture, so through the USOC, I set up mandatory training for all staff and coaches on EEOC protections and workplace standards to ensure our people were trained and expectations were clear from the very start. Policies are only effective if they are backed up with demonstrated behaviors of the leadership. This is part of our culture at USABS and we never compromise those values, particularly with the leadership team.

The recent abuses of our young athletes that have been uncovered at the hands of those they trusted is beyond deplorable and we must do everything in our power to identify the root causes for why each and every abuse happened, and what it will take to make sure similar abuses do not happen to others in the future. USA Bobsled & Skeleton is fortunate to have been able to protect our athletes thus far, but no organization is immune to this threat and we can never be complacent in our policies, rules, or standards of conduct. I say, "our young athletes" because collectively, we all represent Olympic sport and when one organization fails to protect an athlete, we all have failed that athlete.

We are not a large NGB and we have unique challenges. Our membership is small and although we have not needed to utilize the SafeSport organization for investigating claims, they have been incredibly valuable for offering training, awareness, policy guidance and education to our athletes, coaches, and staff. We have adopted a SafeSport policy and updated our bylaws to reflect our commitment to protecting athletes and supporting the SafeSport organization.

Another way our NGB is unique is that we do not have a direct athlete pipeline from the university system, so we are responsible for finding athletes, introducing them to the sports, and training all levels from beginners to Olympic medalists. We are also responsible for developing coaches or hiring them away from our competitors. We do not generate revenue from events or membership, so we rely on sponsors, donors and the USOC for funding. The largest portion of that funding comes from the USOC. This is largely due to the importance technology plays in our sports and the high cost of shipping that technology around the world for international competitions.

Prior to 1998, bobsled pilots were responsible for purchasing their own sleds and the U.S. fell far behind our competitors around the world. That is the single largest contributor to the 46-year medal drought we experienced prior to 2002. Geoff Bodine came forward after the 1992 Olympic Games and we began a partnership with the Bo-Dyn Bobsled Project to build American bobsleds that were owned by USBSF and provided to the National Team. We started a similar technology program focused on the 2-Man bobsled discipline in 2010 with our partners at BMW North America. Every bobsled medal that has been earned by the USA after 1956 was earned in either a Bo-Dyn bobsled or BMW bobsled. To put that in perspective, in the past five Winter Olympic Games, 30 American athletes were standing on a medal podium at the Olympic Games thanks to our investment in technology. Six of those thirty got to watch the American flag rise to the playing of the National Anthem. Our coaches and athletes were a big part of those programs, but without our technology partners and the modest, but critical funding provided by the USOC, it simply would not have been possible. That is the reality of our sport.

The first part of our mission statement is to "...enable United States athletes to achieve sustained competitive excellence in Olympic competition." That is only possible if we begin with, and maintain as our highest priority, their protection. The uniqueness of the NGBs must be considered as we explore strategies for improving athlete protection. Therefore, we must exercise caution against the temptation to paint well-run NGBs who are effectively protecting their athletes with the same broad brush used for NGBs that have failed to do the same. The same caution should be used when considering massive structural changes within the USOC that will impact the NGBs in drastically different ways. We owe it to our athletes to both ensure they are protected and help them to achieve their dreams of representing the United States in the Olympic Games.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the important issues facing the Olympic family. We can never stop looking for gaps in the system or for ways to make our sports safer for athletes. I would be happy to answer your questions.