

**Written Testimony of USA Taekwondo for the Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, Insurance and Data Security**

Chairman Thune, Subcommittee Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, Members of the Committee. My name is Stephen McNally. I am the Executive Director of USA Taekwondo, a member of the United States Olympic Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony to the Committee.

It has been exactly a year since I was appointed as the new leader of USA Taekwondo, and I think it's fair to say that it has been perhaps the organization's toughest year since its incorporation in 2004. While we have faced fierce criticism, we have tried to be forthcoming, cooperative, and as transparent as possible regarding ongoing investigations and legal proceedings into historical allegations of abuse involving our team members.

Today's testimony will outline the steps we have taken over the past twelve months, and the steps we intend to take in the near future. We will also propose solutions in areas where we think we need help from, and collaboration with outside bodies if we are to be successful in this endeavor to protect the nation's amateur athletes from the devastating effects of abuse at the hands of their coaches and peers.

I was fortunate that by the time of my appointment the U.S. Center for SafeSport was already in existence, and I am grateful to the U.S. Olympic Committee and the U.S. Senate for their work in making that happen. Where investigations are concerned, USA Taekwondo defers to the Center for SafeSport's expertise and exclusive jurisdiction. If we receive information regarding an allegation involving potential sexual misconduct, we do the following:

- 1) Report the allegation to the U.S. Center for SafeSport for response and resolution.
- 2) If there is an allegation of criminal activity, report to the relevant law enforcement agencies.
- 3) If the alleged actions could place our community in danger we immediately issue an interim suspension without presumption of guilt, barring any further participation by the accused in USA Taekwondo events or activities until such time as the U.S. Center for SafeSport concludes its work.

We follow this process in *every case* regardless of the amount of evidence - reporting everything from a complete, detailed and documented statement to the most general of third party reports - to the Center.

USA Taekwondo is also working hard to educate and empower our community through our “#notinmysport” initiative, which continues to build momentum. Our hope is to see it evolve into an independent non-profit organization of its own in the near future and be embraced by

other NGBs and even other sporting organizations. Our partnership with the Fighting Spirit Safety group provides personal empowerment, safety information and training to athletes to help them build confidence and awareness of situations that could become dangerous – now mandatory training for all National Team members. Shortly we will create a new position of Head of Athlete Safety and take another important step forward. The position will be filled by a high-quality individual with a reputation for her no-nonsense attitude and passion for the wellbeing of athletes of all ages.

We have increased the number of people who must undergo SafeSport training in order to be eligible to even attend our events, let alone participate, and we will shortly begin to make easily available the details of those coaches who have passed a background check and completed the SafeSport training through our CoachSafe initiative. This will be accompanied by a wide-ranging awareness campaign within taekwondo designed to educate parents on the importance of making sure that the coaches in their children's school are trained and cleared to coach. Although USA Taekwondo has no authority over non-member coaches, our hope is that this new program will nevertheless increase the number of SafeSport-trained coaches who have had their backgrounds checked.

These initiatives should send a clear message to our community – misconduct will simply not be tolerated within USA Taekwondo, and perpetrators will be removed without hesitation. For an

NGB of our size these investments of time and resources demonstrate our strong commitment to community safety.

While I am proud of the work the team at USA Taekwondo is undertaking in the area of athlete protection, our authority is limited to the removal of membership privileges within our own organization. I submit to you that where our authority ends is where the Committee can have the greatest impact.

Taekwondo is a community of small business owners, and with just 15,000 members USA Taekwondo has a sphere of influence that affects only a small percentage of the taekwondo practitioners in the United States.

In prior testimony to Congress USA Taekwondo called for consideration of a National Amateur Athletic Coach licensing program and repeats that call again in this testimony to the Senate. If we are serious about protecting all athletes there must be an effective sanction to deter and punish sexual predators. As we are learning, the standard of proof required to remove an individual's right to membership is significantly lower (although still too high) than it is for a criminal prosecution. There is nothing to prevent someone who has had their USA Taekwondo membership removed because of sexual misconduct from going on to work with children whose parents may be completely unaware of their history.

If licensing or certification was required for *all* amateur athletic coaches and administrators, anyone who was the subject of a license revocation or suspension would have a record that could make them ineligible to work with amateur athletes in any sport. This is a meaningful consequence. Potential loss of livelihood can and would be a powerful deterrent.

Via licensing fees, this system could also provide vital financial resources and accompanying independence for the U.S. Center for SafeSport.

Subjecting a business to any level of regulation is not to be undertaken lightly. However, the nation abounds with professions that require practitioners to be licensed. Governments have already recognized the vital importance of child welfare where licensing or certifying daycare providers, physical education teachers, and school social workers is concerned. Coaches should be no different. Even a funeral director requires a license to care for the dead. Surely the dead are not more important than children.

USA Taekwondo would very much like to be involved in the discussions around such a system.

To be clear, we are not asking for any additional authority or opportunities to generate revenue. We envision a federal effort to create a model system of licensing that could be

adopted by states. With adequate information-sharing with the Center for SafeSport and other NGBs like USA Taekwondo, a better network of protection for athletes can emerge.

While it is unlikely that any solution will be perfect, we believe such a system would be a truly effective response to the problem of sexual abuse of athletes. Licensing is a proven method that provides transparency, accountability, and community protection. We have reached a point in our national discussion about sexual abuse where we have to do more than express outrage and fire everyone who is in a leadership position.

We would welcome the opportunity to answer any further questions for the record, and again thank the committee for the opportunity to provide this written testimony.