

Thank you Chairman Thune for the invitation to testify before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation's Consumer Protection, Product Safety, Insurance, and Data Security Subcommittee hearing entitled, "Olympic Abuse: The Role of National Governing Bodies in Protecting Our Athletes". As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse during my competitive years as a speed skater, I am here to speak truth to the negligence, and at times exploitation of children. As well as to discuss ideas to create safer sport environments for current and future children through balanced, purposeful, and effective policy, to the best of my ability.

My name is Bridie Farrell. I hold a bachelor of science in Policy Analysis and Management from Cornell University. I am co-founder and CEO of NY Loves Kids, Inc. I am 36 years old and reside in Brooklyn, NY with my partner Andrew and dog Lexington.

In 1988/89 my parents enrolled my brother Patrick Farrell and I in speed skating with the Saratoga Winter Club. I was 6, smiling, and loving everything about racing fast. Ironically, my reasons for being here today began around the same time I was just learning to lace up.

## BACKGROUND

By April 1990 Northern Michigan University's Human Resources Department and Public Safety Department, the United States Olympic Committee via the United States Olympic Education Center, members of the US Speed Skating Team, and members of USA Boxing knew of the sexual misconduct of resident athlete, coach, and employee of Northern MI University, Andy Gabel.

Documents obtained by FOIA request, that are attached to this testimony, reveal both an inadequate investigation and a successful cover up.

An individual within the Boxing community witnessed a young, 14 year old, female (Jane Doe) entering and exiting Andy Gabel's dormroom in Mayland Hall at Northern MI University on numerous occasions. Andy Gabel was 24 or 25 at this time. In the botched investigation there is no record of interviewing Jane Doe nor interviewing Andy Gabel. There is also no documentation of contacting the parents of Jane Doe. Numerous adults, all men, were made aware of a criminal situation and no one alerted the parents of the 14 year old child.

I will highlight a few sections now. The entire report is amended to my testimony.

criminal ones to the allegations. He suggested that we schedule a meeting with Mr. John Hamman, Director of N M U Dept. of Human Resources and an attorney. We also felt that we needed to be aware of both parties' rights in this matter.

A.

The men leading the investigation acknowledged:

- 1. aware of the severity and
2. acknowledge the rights of both parties.

However the municipal police department is not included in these documents - thus not taking the situation as seriously as they know they should. Secondly, at no point is Jane Doe interviewed or contacted, nor are her parents.

When these men wrote both parties, I can only wish they had spelled out the parties. It certainly reads that the parties that need equal rights are the institution and the male abuser.

B. The report concludes there is insufficient hard evidence. However, please read the statement that is included in the report.

The excerpt below is from the official report and states Lubs who is an adult within USA Boxing sees Jane Doe leaving Andy Gabel's room late at night, in sleeping clothing, with a blanket, and crying.

When Andy Gabel is asked an explanation word is the he tells her they are ending seeing each other.

Basic logic backs up one step to: they were seeing each other.

After checking the person in at the desk LUBS and the Resident Manager were escorting him to his room. While en route he observed Jane Doe coming out of GABEL's room wearing what appeared to be night clothing and carrying a blanket. In addition Jane Doe was crying. LUBS said that this occurred between 0130 and 0200 hours. LUBS said that he later heard that the reason that Jane Doe was crying was because GABEL told her that he wasn't going to have anything more to do with her. (LUBS could not recall who he had heard this from). Complaint#389-90

C. Below is a conversation between speed skater Charles King and Moore who is involved with the investigation. Additional documentation of an inappropriate/illegal sexual relationship.

During the conversation MOORE mentioned that GABEL and C. KING were roommates in Italy. KING allegedly told MOORE (in January of 1990) that GABEL and Jane Doe went into their room while KING was there, that they went to bed together, and it was obvious that they had sex.

D. And for additional information on the inappropriate relationship, we have it admitted from Andy Gabel's mouth in the following excerpt.

However MOORE said that on numerous occasions GABEL has told him about how he had gone out on a date with Jane Doe and that she paid for everything.

E. In conclusion:

Due to the fact that none of the allegations concerning sexual relations between GABEL and Jane Doe could be substantiated, there is no further action contemplated by this department.

*Victor J. LaDuke*  
Victor J. La Duke  
Investigator, NMU Public Safety

This is where the story of Andy Gabel in sports should end.

Let me confirm what you're afraid to hear: his career did not end here. Andy Gabel went on competing through 1998. He then became involved with The Salt Lake Olympic Committee, the President of US Speed Skating while I was still an athlete, and finally to the Chairman of the ISU where he resigned in 2013. This sexual predator remained in speed skating for over 30 years after his behavior was identified.

#### BRIDIE'S STORY

On February 28, 2013 I confidently sat in the Lake Effect recording studio in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with Mitch Teich to record my first disclosure on child sexual abuse at the hands and ego of Andy Gabel.

I was sexually abused at 15 by a 33-year-old teammate in his house in Saratoga Springs, NY. I was molested on a blanket he laid out at the Saratoga Springs National Battlefield. I was molested in the Saratoga Springs spa state park. I was molested in ice rinks. I was molested in restaurant parking lots. I was sexually abused on the grounds of the United States Olympic Training Center in Lake Placid, NY. I was sexually abused in my high school parking lot. I was sexually abused in the back hall of my parents' house. I was molested in my driveway after early ice training, before the sun had even come up.

The man who molested me perfected the deceitful art of grooming. He established trust within my family. He saw my father as his doctor. He sought out piano lessons from my mum. He drove me to and from training – always saying hello to my siblings and parents with a smile. He used his college degree to further con my parents of his positive role in my impressionable life.

The man who abused me gave me gifts. He gave me his sponsor issued Oakley sunglasses. He purchased a \$200 ice skate sharpener apparatus called a jig, for me at the 1998 Olympic Trials in Lake Placid.

My strict parents never let us kids drive our wood-paneled family station wagon. The man who conned my parents and abused me, let wide-eyed 15 year old me slip behind the wheel on leather, power seats, and drive his Lexus.

The man who abused me granted me permission to attend my 10th grade High School Homecoming Dance, with agreement to skip every after party and phone when home. Neither family nor friends knew the leash I was on, a leash that got shorter and shorter.

I distinctly recall lying on my side, the pedophile behind me. He pinched my skin below my naval, warning I would have to lose that fat to be a successful athlete. I was 15 and 121 pounds. That message is seared in my memory. For years following his destructive advice I obsessively measured any circumstance on my body - stomach, arms, legs, etc. I had a white string measured with knots, tucked inside a black and white composition notebook, deceptively labeled French.

## IMPACT

At 15, I was the disposable meat of a known 33-year-old child sexual predator. When he had torn apart all he wanted, he left my picked over adolescent carcass to decay and rot. My body hurt; it hurt so badly. I screamed. Sometimes out loud, sometimes in writing, sometimes into a bottle, frequently into overtraining.

When I was about 20 years old, I asked a friend that should I die unexpectedly, to rush to my parents' home and recover my journals. Even after a hypothetical death, I was too ashamed to let my parents know I was sexually abused under their purview.

Bouts of depression came and lowered, but never left. I ultimately left skating in December 2005.

The first time I remember audibly screaming that I wanted to die was in 2006. I was done skating, I was trying to move on from the nightmare, however, the pain inside me only grew. Over my flip-phone I screamed to my mother, "I WANT TO DIE." I was in pain.

After graduating from Cornell University I moved to Harlem, NY. Countless mornings I wanted to jump in front of the oncoming Metro North Train. 10 years after the child sexual abuse ended, I actively wanted to end the pain.

After only a year of living in my Harlem apartment I had to move, because the huge window taunted me to jump. It wasn't the lure of jumping, but the knowledge of falling only 3 stories down to the sidewalk would not end my pain. I had to move.

In 2012 I reached bottom. My mum sat next to me as I just sobbed in pain. She begged me to tell her how she could help. I was in a chair, and she sat near my feet, her head on my knees. I finally asked for what I wanted, I asked my own mother to kill me.

## DISCLOSURE

In 2013, I returned to speed skating after a 7-year hiatus. I met Claire, a young fearless girl who is the reason I knew telling my story, telling the truth would be the right thing to do. I knew the insulting New York laws only opened me up to legal repercussions. I had been through so much pain, I was still decaying in pain – I decided I would sacrifice for Claire and all future Claire's. I went public as a survivor of child sexual abuse by known, respected, and honored Andy Gabel.



My depression reemerged with the most suffocating darkness in 2015. For my safety, all medicine and anything that could be used to overdose were confiscated from my possession. In September of 2016, again for my own safety, I was not permitted to spend a night alone. Collectively, friends arranged who would spend the night at my apartment, ensuring I would wake in the morning. I was 34 years old.

And this January I shook in fear when a scheduled routine gynecological exam. January 2018 marks 20 years. It has been 20 years. I am still haunted by child sexual abuse.

*I have grown to be a strong and brave woman, not because of the child sexual abuse that I endured, but despite the abuse.*

Do you think I am brave?

Many praise my bravery - bravery in retelling my story, bravery in telling the truth.

Please take pause - what do you acknowledge as brave?

Standing up against the man who sexually abused me 20 years ago is brave. Then please, recognize the hypocrisy in expecting a child athlete to report sexual abuse while it is happening.

For many children it is impossible to disclose molestation or rape, because we did not and they do not have the vocabulary. I did not learn that being molested by a 33 year old man was a crime until I was at Cornell University; I was 27 years old.

Over 80% of child sexual abuse perpetrators know their victim, the child. On average survivors of child sexual abuse do not disclose until into his/her 40's. 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused by his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. 1 in 4 girls are sexually abused by her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. I have three sisters and two brothers. I am the statistic: I am the 1 in 4.



My story was told on February 28, 2013. Within days Andy Gabel releases the following statement<sup>1</sup>:

MARCH 2, 2013, 9:52 AM

**T**hree-time Olympic speedskater Andy Gabel apologized Friday for alleged sexual misconduct more than a decade ago with a 15-year-old female teammate when he was in his 30s.

"Almost two decades ago I displayed poor judgment in a brief, inappropriate relationship with a female teammate," Gabel told the Tribune. "It did not include sex, however I know what happened was wrong, and I make no excuses for my behavior. I apologize to her, and I am sorry for bringing negative attention to the sport that I love."

Scott Blackmun of the USOC made the following statements<sup>2</sup>:

"In sport, as in life, we have a duty to do everything we can to protect our children from abuse at the hands of adults," USOC chief executive Scott Blackmun said in a statement to the Tribune. "We are glad that Ms. Farrell chose to tell her story, because it will make others who have been abused aware that they are not alone and hopefully shine a light on the resources that are available to administrators, coaches, parents and athletes to help protect our young athletes."

However, when I met with Scott Blackmun, the then CEO of the USOC he specifically asked that I direct athletes to report to HIM and not to the media. He also made one other comment crystal clear - there was nothing he nor the USOC could do for me. The USOC would not look into taking away Andy Gabel's US Speed Skating Membership nor Hall of Fame spot. The USOC would not look into preventing Andy Gabel from coach in other sports - not even within speed skating. Mr Blackmun made it clear by suggesting I return to my home state of NY and deal with the situation.

Mr Blackmun also told me that there was nothing the USOC could do - that the USOC did not have such jurisdiction over the NGBs. However, in the midst of the USA Gymnastic shake down the

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1

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/international/chi-olympian-apologizes-for-alleged-sexual-misconduct-20130301-story.html>

2

<http://wuw.com/post/exclusive-audio-interview-speedskater-bridie-farrell-speaks-out-about-sexual-abuse-andy-gabel#stream/0>

USOC acknowledge the NGB could be decertified and overtaken by the head organization. It certainly seems the USOC wants to pick and choose when to be involved, and it seems only when it favors the USOC.

I have spent a large part of the past three to four years working to reform the statute of limitations in NY for child sexual abuse in a bill we call the Child Victims Act. This time in the political arena has illustrated the need to hear not just both sides, but all sides. I've learned the value in having someone who has experience in the field. I have also learned the important issues are the ones discussed in hearings - again, I would like to thank you for sincerely pondering how best to make sports safer.

Again, the majority of my work is on the state level, I do have three concrete suggestions on how to improve the overall process within the USOC.

First, there really, really needs to be a higher percentage of athletes that are required to be on the National Governing Body Boards. In my opinion, closer to 50% of athletes voices ought to be heard. Much like I am here today based on my experiences of child sexual abuse, someone with actual speed skating experience should be at the table discussing how the organization moves forward.

Following suggestion one, the definition of an athlete ought to be expanded, in my opinion. Even with my competitive experience, I've aged out of being able to run for a position that must be held by an athlete. An older athlete doesn't forget too quickly the sacrifices of being an athlete! Also, an older individual will bring additional real world life experience to the position- a valuable attribute.

And finally, when there is any disclosure of sexual abuse, the police must be notified. How are we still living in an age of the Fox guarding the Hen house? Why.

In my opinion, I find it to be risky business for the United States Olympic Committee to dabble in adjudicating claims of sexual assault, sexual abuse, or rape. Rather than trying to protect the image of the organization or try to maintain sponsors, I believe the USOC should lobby for states to resurrect archaic statute of limitation laws on child sexual abuse from Alabama to Wisconsin from Oregon to New York.

#### IS THE USOC BETTER OFF NOW THAT SCOTT BLACKMUN STEPPED DOWN?

I would like to bring two criminal cases into this conversation. On 12/26/2017 Ryan P. Medina a former US Postal worker was arrested in Colorado Springs, CO for having a sack letters that were not his. He was arrested on federal charges, faces a \$250,000 fine and up to 5 years in prison.

On 1/15/2018 Tyshawn Gayle was arrested for allegedly answering ads on Craigslist and then stealing from the new roommates. He faces time. A total of 10 Craigslist victims have come forward and the arrest was able to be made by tips from the community.

Scott Blackmun knew that Dr Larry Nassar was a monster. Yet, Scott Blackmun still fed young girls in leotards through a door knowing full well there was a hungry lion on the other side. Over 250 women have come forward. People have died. Families have been torn apart. Lives have been largely ruined. Hundreds of women have PTSD, depression, anxiety, trust challenges, to name a few. The CEO that looks the other way or strategically wears earmuffs is just as much a kingpin in the game as the one committing the crime.

Institutions need to be held accountable. Survivors need to be acknowledged.

Without policy reform the unjust muzzle will remain bounded on children while safeguarding the pedofiles to roam free. So long as this abuse of power continues, the horror in gyms, dojos, fields, courts, pools, tracks, mountains, and ice rinks will not end.