



**Statement of Pat Kelleher, Executive Director of USA Hockey  
Before The U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation  
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety and Data Security**

March 20, 2024

Thank you Chairman Hickenlooper, Ranking Member Blackburn and distinguished members of the sub-committee. It is a privilege to be here with you today to discuss athlete safety, an issue that is the top priority every day at USA Hockey both on and off the ice.

While the focus today is on the effectiveness of the U.S. Center for SafeSport, it's important to highlight the significant role our National Governing Bodies, or NGBs, play in both grassroots and elite athletics in our country.

In my role as executive director of USA Hockey, and also for nearly four years now as the chair of the NGB Council within the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, I have first-hand knowledge of the essential role NGBs play in providing infrastructure and opportunity for our youth through sport.

We know there is always room for improvement – but the importance of the NGBs in positively contributing to the overall health and well-being of children and adults through sport cannot be overstated.

While we have seen conduct that is deplorable in both sport and across society, NGBs have worked diligently, in concert with the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, the U.S. Center for SafeSport, and others, to improve the landscape for everyone involved, particularly related to athlete safety.

So while it's important to learn from the past, it is also important to recognize the great good NGBs contribute to in our overall society.

Related to the U.S. Center for SafeSport, I'd like to first share the unequivocal support for the concept of the Center and its mission from the NGB community.

The U.S. Center for SafeSport is a necessary, valuable and important part of the landscape of youth and elite sports within the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement, and we believe that all youth sporting organizations should be subject to the same standards NGBs are required to have in place, including background screens, SafeSport training, mandatory reporting, and monitoring and auditing of their programs to ensure compliance.

There are, however, substantial changes needed – and needed now – to restore the faith and confidence in the Center to appropriately reflect why it was created.

We need the Center to be effective in performing its mission. The reason we are all here is because our greater sporting community, including the NGBs, have lost faith that the Center will timely, properly and fairly resolve cases of misconduct.

At USA Hockey, I'm proud to say we've been a leader and champion of SafeSport since its introduction, and our general counsel, Casey Jorgensen, who is here with me today, has played an important role in working with others to bring positive and productive concepts for change forward to improve the deficiencies in the system.

We also appreciate the recent work of the Commission on the State of the U.S. Olympics & Paralympics on the topic of athlete safety.

While we've shared our concerns with the Center, we've haven't seen substantial change yet, and as we sit here today, significant and meaningful progress is still needed.

I'd like to share the areas we feel are most significant that need to be addressed to help restore the faith and confidence in the Center.

1. **Improving operational effectiveness of the Center**, including:
  - a. Exercising jurisdiction only over the most egregious cases that require Center involvement;
  - b. Significant changes to the response and resolution process to increase communications with -- and transparency to -- the involved parties;
  - c. Reaching a decision on the merits of every case for which it accepts jurisdiction, which would reduce the number of administrative closures and free up the Center's resources to address the most serious cases.
2. **Oversight of the Center**, which could include requiring the Center to appear before congressional committees to report each year on its operations, and also having NGB and athlete representatives who serve on the Center's Board of Directors elected by those bodies rather than selected by the Center.
3. **Funding** – As the federal government has mandated the operation of the Center, we firmly believe the Center should be federally funded and subject to Congressional oversight.

These issues are central in our collective efforts to help restore the trust and credibility in the Center that is so essential.

In addition to my opening remarks, I've also submitted two other documents – one from the NGB Council that details requests for change to the Center dated December 4, 2023, and another from USA Hockey in response to the Center's request for feedback on its resolution process dated December 8, 2023. I also believe you have our response to Senators Blackburn and Peters dated Feb. 21, 2024, addressing their request to USA Hockey for feedback on the U.S. Center for SafeSport.

Thank you again for the invitation to be here today. On behalf of USA Hockey, we look forward to supporting collaborative efforts needed between NGBs and the U.S. Center for SafeSport, among others, to find common sense solutions that make a positive difference in keeping our sports landscape as safe as possible.