



**USA Weightlifting**  
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Statement of Phil Andrews  
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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

Strengthening and Empowering U.S. Amateur Athletes: Moving Forward with Solutions  
October 3, 2018

Good afternoon Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and Senators of the Subcommittee.

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence before this Subcommittee, and for the action and interest you are taking in the Olympic & Paralympic movement.

By way of introduction, USA Weightlifting is the National Governing Body (NGB), responsible for the Olympic Sport of Weightlifting. We have approximately 27,000 members and an annual budget in the region of \$6m, as of today 2.9% of that funding is derived from US Olympic Committee funds while the remainder is derived from USA Weightlifting generated funding. Of our athlete membership, our gender split is 53%/47% towards the male population.

I would like to open with an apology. To those athletes within our sport—including those who came to Weightlifting from somewhere else—that suffered at the hands of sexual, emotional or physical abuse—I am sorry. We, as the US Olympic and Paralympic movement have failed you. This should not have happened, and when it did, the response should have been immediate and impactful. If this did not happen, I am sorry. We, as the Olympic and Paralympic movement, **can** and **will** do better.

At its very core, before a medal is won or the Olympic flame is lit, sport is about right to enjoyment. No athlete should have that right taken away.



Member, U.S. Olympic Committee



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Our NGB (National Governing Body), along with others in the Olympic movement, has taken significant steps to deter abuse, and will continue to look for more ways to improve. While we can never guarantee abuse will not happen in Olympic & Paralympic Sport, we can do more to protect our athletes, and that is exceptionally important.

To that end, our NGB has made confidential mental health and recovery tools available to our athletes who suffered abuse, including those who suffered abuse in another sport. By the end of 2018, that counselling and mental health network, dealing not only with abuse and trauma but with other areas of mental health relevant to our athlete population, will be made available to our entire athlete population within the sport of Weightlifting.

In the rest of my testimony, I have tried to cover several subjects raised over the last year with us by either members of the Committee, or their staff.

### **Pro-active measures taken by USA Weightlifting**

USA Weightlifting has tried to take pro-active measures to remain at the forefront of integrity issues, covering Abuse, Ethics and Doping issues in sport.

As part of a governance review of the organization in 2017, USA Weightlifting implemented the first and only independent Ethics and Judicial Committees among the Olympic & Paralympic NGBs. This group of volunteer individuals is selected from outside of the sport with relevant expertise in the space including a former Inspector General, Federal Prosecutors, Title IX Investigators and those serving in Fortune 500 Chief of Ethics positions. Our athlete population is represented on these committees by Elite Athletes both within and outside of our sport.

Having this independent model allows us to deal appropriately with cases that fall under our Code of Ethics, which is reviewed annually by the same group, as well as outside counsel, our Athlete Advisory Council and Board of Directors. This model also gives our organization the ability to adjudicate fairly, cases the U.S. Center for SafeSport chose not to take, including claims in the areas of Emotional and Physical Abuse.

USA Weightlifting, in partnership with the U.S. Center for SafeSport has made changes to how abuse is able to be reported. We now have buttons right on the front of our website to report abuse, ethical issues as well as doping offences. These methods to report are also repeated on social media and during our national events across the country. A full list of measures can be found via our website, under the SafeSport tab.



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Our organization has taken proactive measures to ensure that any individual with direct athlete contact must pass a comprehensive criminal background check and complete education provided by the U.S. Center for SafeSport before contact with an athlete. This is in line with other National Governing Bodies.

Within our sport, we are the only Weightlifting federation worldwide to allow the weigh-in within the singlet. This sport specific measure allows athletes over 18 to choose to wear the singlet rather than strip down during the weigh in process. Athletes under the age 18 are required to weigh-in wearing a singlet. We have also offered sport specific guidance to the appropriate way to coach an athlete, especially about the appropriate way to coach an athlete while minimizing touch during competition.

In the area of Sports Medicine, USA Weightlifting has a specific Sports Medicine policy including a process to sign off on an individual before the opportunity arises to work with our athletes. This policy includes the rotation of professionals to balance the need for familiarity with athletes and the protection of athletes by rotating medical professionals to reduce the opportunity for abuse. All USA Weightlifting Sports Medicine members are reviewed and recommended by their peers ensuring there is a level of accountability to the Sports Medicine area. At all times, Sports Medicine treatment must be given in the most public forum possible.

But our work is not done. USA Weightlifting is keen to continue to learn and put in place proactive measures to ensure athletes can participate in our sport with as little risk as possible.

### **Building an athlete-centric culture**

There is a strong need to have an athlete-centric culture within the US Olympic & Paralympic Movement, and perhaps in the wider International Olympic Movement too. We set out to create this within USA Weightlifting in 2016. Through feedback from our athletes, we are seeing some success, but our work cannot stop.

Culture is made up of a great deal of areas, and the work to create a positive and athlete-focused culture continues. But at its core, our culture is built by proactive collaboration and communication within the athlete population. Since the service of athletes is at our core, listening intently to them is how we changed our culture at its heart. For example, we handed power to our athletes regarding selection procedures giving our Athlete Advisory Council the right to approve, disapprove or amend our process as they as athletes believe it ought to be. We have also involved directly our athlete population, often beyond our elite athletes, in designing our athlete remuneration program, and in designing our anti-doping program.



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Proactive communication with athletes means two-way focused communication with elite, emerging and non-elite athletes alike. Those are different audiences with different needs. But by putting our own biases aside, and actually hearing athletes' concerns and what they wanted from us, we were able to transform our organization.

Recently, along with other National Governing Bodies, we had the opportunity to attend the Olympic & Paralympic Assembly. It was clear that the US Olympic Committee has taken and continues to take proactive steps towards a focus on putting athletes first. In the words of our own athlete representative at the Assembly, there is reason for optimism towards the steps being taken by the U.S. Olympic Committee, including a new Athlete Services division, a renewed focus on winning in the right way, and an increased commitment to the ACE program.

### The US Center for SafeSport

The U.S. Center for SafeSport opened in 2017 with a mission to educate and investigate items related to abuse in sport.

The concept of the U.S. Center for SafeSport closely resembles that of the United States Anti-Doping Agency, set up in 2001. The U.S. Anti-Doping Agency is recognized worldwide as among the leading National Anti-Doping Organizations (NADOs) on the planet.

Both of these agencies stand independent of the National Governing Bodies, and both were started by the US Olympic Committee in response to a significant issue of the day.

One strong difference between the U.S. Center for SafeSport and the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency is the amount of funding from the Federal Government.

This, in turn, leads the Center to have a need for fundraising from private donors. While this theoretically makes sense, many of the traditional fundraising sources are not available to the center. For example, while organizations in the Olympic movement typically have membership income, event income, sponsorships and corporate partners, experience has shown that corporations are not terribly anxious to become sponsors of the Center, and the Center does not have the ability to provide significant exposure to a sponsor, which is a key element of a corporate partnership. Additionally, donor income is a typical resource generation tool for Olympic & Paralympic movement organizations, and similarly experience has shown this type of organization not only will struggle to attract funds to support these initiatives in this manner but this distracts from the core mission of the Center.

By contrast, the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency receives more than \$10 million in federal funding on an annual basis. The U.S. Government is also the leading contributor to the World Anti-Doping Agency.





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This funding allows the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency to concentrate on its task of leading the charge for Clean Sport within our borders while providing a strong and independent voice abroad.

In many nations, an inherent conflict is created when a Federal Government financially supports and endorses a Ministry of Sport. In turn that Ministry funds both an Olympic and/or Paralympic Committee tasked with winning medals as its' primary goal while the very same ministry supports a National Anti-Doping Agency to police the nation's sporting culture.

Therefore, the federal funding given to the US Anti-Doping Agency fundamentally upholds its ability to hold the US Olympic Committee, U.S. National Governing Bodies and even International Federations to account while at the same time working proactively on additional doping control projects with those same organizations. It also provides for an ultimate accountability to the Federal Government.

I believe additional funding from the Federal Government, like what has happened with the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, will allow the Center to better carry out its goals of eliminating abuse in sport, while acting independently and holding the entire Olympic and Paralympic movement to account.

For the part of the Olympic & Paralympic movement, the National Governing Body Council committed to double the amount of funding for the Center in 2019 compared to 2018 and have showed a willingness to do so again. So too, the U.S. Olympic Committee has committed over \$6 million in funding to the Center for the calendar year in 2019, while the NGBs are providing a combined \$2 million, including a commitment from our National Governing Body to quadruple our commitment.

With that said, the headcount and quality of investigative team is still insufficient at the Center. It is clear the Center requires additional human and financial resources to ensure its operation processes capability are equal of that of a much more mature organization such as the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, and that its independence is unquestioned.

The addition of further resources from the Federal Government would thus assist the Center in a number of ways to truly serve the athlete population in the way that is desired by all. One thing that I am confident we all agree on - the Center MUST succeed. We need a strong and vibrant Center that can take predatory individuals out of our sports for good, serve as a deterrent for those who might commit heinous acts, and to educate the sports community and the general public.

I do want to commend the Center for the outstanding job that the Center is doing in the area of Education. The challenge of managing a mass education program across a diverse community like the Olympic and Paralympic movement is indeed a large one. While there is space for specialist education



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and tools which the Center are currently developing which specifically face athletes parents, the overall collaboration and educational partnership with the Center has been outstanding.

### 3. The USA Weightlifting collaboration with the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency.

In order that we protect the rights of the clean athlete, USA Weightlifting has developed a proactive relationship with the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) which respects the independence of the organization. We also participate in additional partnership opportunities to protect clean athletes on the podium. Some of these initiatives may provide some practices that could be applied in the area of athlete safety, and to a degree supports how we have designed our athlete safety programs within USA Weightlifting.

In 2017, USA Weightlifting had 21 domestic positive tests, in 2018 we have realized a much lower number so far.

Some proactive measures we have taken include a collaboration with USADA to ensure that important information on anti-doping is easy to obtain, easy to report and easy to use. We have also strategically collaborated with USADA to provide anti-doping education as a required element to all of our members before they are able to take part in an event. I believe we are the only National Sporting Federation worldwide to do so. More recently, we've worked with USADA and the International Weightlifting Federation to take this approach to the World level.

We also implemented the Lift Clean program, where we fund USADA to test additional USA Weightlifting athletes in and out of competition with no notice to the athlete. This ensures that the anti-doping culture is implemented at the local level. It is critically important to note, USA Weightlifting does not have final say on who is tested, and we have no involvement in the results management of cases, therefore maintaining the independence of the process despite USA Weightlifting acting as a funding partner. USA Cycling has a similar program with similar degrees of success.

Our exceptional work with USADA shows that it is possible for an agency to work as an independent enforcement body while strategically collaborating with the National Governing Bodies and to be regarded as the Gold Standards by our athletes.

### 4. Cultural Changes within the US Olympic Committee & US Olympic Movement

The recent news that Susanne Lyons will become the President of the U.S. Olympic Committee is outstanding. Ms. Lyons has shown to me personally that she is not afraid of the difficult conversations, she thinks of the athlete and ultimately that she is a good person. This need for a culture change at the USOC was clear when I was told by an Associate Director of the U.S. Olympic Committee with





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responsibility for National Governing Body relations that within the last three years that sponsor needs came before athlete needs. With Ms. Lyons at the helm, and the hiring of Sarah Hirshland as CEO, this directional leadership change is exceptional news.

I want to be clear that winning is not a bad thing, but as a Movement, we need to win the *right way*. When Team USA shows up at the Olympic Games, we are expected by the American public to win, our athletes want to win, we want to support them to that winning position.. A comfortable, well served, confident athlete will ultimately perform better.

I also want to be clear that there are many individuals within the US Olympic Committee who work exceptionally hard to put athletes first, and at the heart of what they do.

The U.S. Olympic Committee remains amongst the most respected and leading Olympic Committees worldwide, the only major Olympic Committee to be non-government funded and the only major Olympic Committee to be integrated with the National Paralympic Committee.

There has been clear changes in the culture of the U.S. Olympic Committee over the last few months and while cultural work can never cease, it is clear to see that there is not only substantive changes occurring within the U.S. Olympic Committee but a strong desire to return to the core value of putting athletes at the heart of the movement.

It is also clear that the U.S. Olympic Committee is raising the expectation upon National Governing Bodies in matters related both to athlete safety, athlete advocacy and culture. In turn, this leadership position has led to the National Governing Bodies taking a role in changing this at the state and local level.

### **The Role of Congress in improving the Olympic and Paralympic Movement and Youth Sport**

USA Weightlifting appreciates the proactive role Congress and this subcommittee in particular has taken in helping the Olympic and Paralympic Movement move forward with the issues we have faced in recent times.

With that said, Congress could take a more proactive approach in supporting the work of the U.S. Center of SafeSport especially in the area of funding. As I previously testified, currently, the funding for the Center is predominately coming from within the Olympic and Paralympic movement itself.





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Similarly, it is vital to recognize the risks that exist outside of the Olympic and Paralympic movement. While USA Weightlifting and our movement colleagues still have work to do, there is a concern that private sector and other organizations running Youth Sport activities in the United States are not necessarily holding themselves to as high a standard as we are striving to do so.

Ultimately, we believe it is the goal of Congress to protect the youth athletes of the United States. To do so, the protections that have been put into place during this period in the Olympic & Paralympic Movement must be implemented in other youth sports organizations. Similarly, where best practices exist in the other organizations, we must ensure we learn from them.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to take any questions you might have.



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