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Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio



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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good morning. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 46 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Monday, October 31, the committee will resume its study of women and girls in sport.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute it when you're not speaking.

For those on Zoom, to hear the interpretation, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use your earpiece and select the desired channel.

I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking list as best we can.

In accordance with our routine motion, I am informing the committee that all witnesses completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

Before we start, I want to seek agreement from the committee to publish and redistribute the press release that was circulated by the clerk last Friday. Has everybody had a chance to look at the press release?

Are all of you in favour of it?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Great. That's approved.

We have a trigger warning. Before we welcome our witnesses, I would like to provide this trigger warning. This is a very difficult study. We'll be discussing experiences related to abuse. This may be

triggering to viewers, members or staff with similar experiences. If you feel distressed or if you need help, please advise the clerk.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

I would like to welcome Waneek Horn-Miller. Waneek is a Mohawk Olympian and a Canadian Hall of Famer.

I would like to welcome, from You Can Play, Inc., Kurt Weaver, chief operations officer, who is online.

I will introduce Dr. Clermont-Dion, who is just coming into the room. Dr. Clermont-Dion is a documentary filmmaker and a post-doctoral fellow at the Centre for the Study of Learning and Performance at Concordia University.

You will each have five minutes for your presentations. Once you see me wave my hand, let's start winding it down.

Waneek, with your approval, I'd like to start with your testimony, so the first five minutes are for you. Please go ahead.

Mrs. Waneek Horn-Miller (Mohawk Olympian, Canadian Hall of Famer, As an Individual): [Pursuant to a motion adopted by the committee on January 30, 2023, this testimony has been deleted. See Minutes of Proceedings for January 30, 2023]

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you very much for coming here. I can tell you that we are so honoured to have you here today to speak to us.

I'm now going to pass it over to Dr. Léa Clermont-Dion.

Léa, you have five minutes.

[Translation]

Dr. Léa Clermont-Dion (Documentary Filmmaker and Post-doctoral Fellow, Center for the Study of Learning Performance, Concordia University, As an Individual): Good morning, everyone. My name is Léa Clermont-Dion, and I have a doctorate in political science. I've been exploring the question of violence against women for about 10 years now. I'm a postdoctoral researcher at Concordia University.

I'm also a sexual assault survivor. I made a complaint within the criminal justice system a few years ago and the assailant was convicted. He appealed and we are still waiting for the appeal court decision, five years after the start of the judicial process. We still don't know the outcome.

I made a film called *T'as juste à porter plainte*, a documentary series that is now part of the training given to legal specialists in Quebec as part of the process of establishing the special court dealing with sexual and domestic violence. I'm interested in this issue, and feel very strongly about it, because I'm the mother of a son and a daughter.

In a few months, I will be working with the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League and will be giving sexual consent training to the players.

The scandal surrounding Hockey Canada shook the whole country and has put a spotlight on the dynamics of sexual domination and violence, and also on its trivialization in sports. This trivialization has been widespread, organized and systemic for too long, and perpetrated by actors in the system, and people in positions of authority. The scandal is unfortunately no more than the tip of the iceberg, and what is needed now is collective awareness and acknowledgement of the problem.

It's a political and social matter, and for many years, blaming the victim has been part of the culture in sports organizations. Certain people are to blame for this. There has to be some accountability on the part of the assailants and the people who were responsible. I'd like to take a moment to pay tribute to the courage of the victims, these heroines who deserve all of our respect.

Curbing this unacceptable behaviour will require solutions. Coaches, authorities and players need to be educated about sexual consent and respect. That's one way to work on prevention, but there is also repair, which I will discuss later.

I have two concrete solutions to propose today. The first has to do with raising awareness. There is an urgent initial need with respect to awareness. There are indeed appropriate forms of sexual consent training, but it will take more than that. We need collectively to acknowledge the fact that the trivialization of sexual violence is a problem. Coaches and players need to be told that it amounts to sexual assault. Most don't know what sexual assault is. The training has to be systematic. As Ms. Horn-Miller described it so well, sports create a form of proximity that facilitates relationships of dominance, authority and abuse.

What's required is a Canada-wide campaign to promote existing resources. The resources are there, and they were established through Sport'Aide. But resources and money are required to make these tools better known and more accessible to players and coaches.

Compulsory training for coaches and players is needed to make them aware of sexual violence and to prevent it. Such training should be neither random nor optional. It should be organized in partnership with women's groups and feminist groups with a view to inclusiveness, and the intersectionality of violence should also be addressed. That's essential. Problems like domination and racism also have to be dealt with in this kind of training and education.

• (1120)

More specifically, I think that the training should include a section on consent and another on demystifying current problems like toxic masculinity and rape culture. On reporting the fence in which

an explanation is given to coaches and all members of staff about the repercussions of being charged on the life of victims. It should also incorporate information about trauma to lay to rest any stereotypes about victims of sexual assault. Finally, there ought to be a section on the impact of sexual violence on victims.

The second option that I am proposing is restitution. It's true that there are tools that make it possible to report assaults, but what are they? Sport aid needs to be transparent. It's important to know the nature of the process for victims when they make a complaint. At what level does this happen? Should restorative justice be used as a model? It's a means of remedy that is interesting and one of the solutions I'd like to put forward.

The traditional judicial process is extremely difficult for victims. It's not always appropriate and that it can be destructive rather than remedial. A process involving mediation or restorative justice can sometimes be useful. It's a practice based on indigenous cultures. It's a relevant option that could be used outside of the judicial system. It's not perfect and requires a structure, sustainable means and a professionalization of the practice.

Transparency is what we want. To conclude...

[English]

The Chair: I'm trying to be very sensitive to the time, so we'll probably be able to do the conclusion through the questions, if that's okay.

[Translation]

Dr. Léa Clermont-Dion: I would just like to finish with a very important short sentence, if I may?

[English]

The Chair: Go for it.

[Translation]

Dr. Léa Clermont-Dion: My comment is for the Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Justin Trudeau.

Prime Minister, in view of the historic crisis that has arisen in the hockey world and sports communities, it's essential for you to become concretely engaged in fighting sexual violence. That's where you have to start to become a feminist. The ball is now in your court

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now go online and turn to Kurt Weaver.

Kurt, please go ahead. You have five minutes.

Mr. Kurt Weaver (Chief Operations Officer, You Can Play, Inc.): Thank you to the committee for the privilege of speaking to you today.

You Can Play, Inc. celebrates this year its 10-year anniversary of working in this space and fighting for LGBTQ2S+ inclusion in sport. We've worked with our sport partners and pro- and amateur-level partners to help them evaluate their sports and improve their inclusion efforts. Our primary mission has been to provide a safe and welcoming space for anyone who wishes to participate in sport as an athlete, coach, referee, administrator and fan—really, in any way they'd like.

Primarily, we work with our partners on visibility and education programs, but we also know that education programs are not the sole key to solving these kinds of issues or problems. They must be part of a larger program that looks at all kinds of safety aspects within sport, as well as the education that helps people realize what they are seeing and what they are experiencing. Really, we want to make sure that we are using our partners' substantial voices to make positive change and impact within the safety and inclusion part of sport.

Diversity and equity inclusion in sport is not just the right thing to do; it makes sport better. It's more accountable. When there are more and different voices, faces and people involved in sport, people are more accountable to themselves and to a sport itself. Frankly, the teams and sports that take on this kind of work are simply better, and they're more successful.

My personal history within this space does not just include working as a coach, athlete and referee for most of my career. I also ran a safe sport program for U.S.A. Rugby for five years, developing policies and procedures, education programs and the safety and reporting side of things. The education program was just a simple first step that we saw as a key to success in these spaces. Education programs are used as a check box to say that we've done something on a subject, but that's simply not the case. It is one piece of a much larger strategy.

I want to highlight one program that I believe is doing some innovative work in this space. It's called Girls Rugby. It was developed by the same person who developed the youth rugby curriculum in Canada for PE classes. Its focus has been on the values-based empowerment of girls in sport.

Part and parcel to the practices and games is a focus on a leadership and values-based approach. The true innovation is the focus on empowering girls to find their voices and confidence and stand for themselves and their teammates, which has been a really interesting way to approach the longer-term solution to some of these things.

I know that we have immediate challenges to deal with and some history to reconcile. However, looking forward, empowering young girls to be leaders and to stand for themselves and their teammates within a sport itself has been a really interesting way to approach this.

I'm so excited to see programs like this. It gives me hope that there will be opportunities for anyone to participate in sports, regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, sexuality or gender identity, and find a safe and welcoming home within sport. It's such a valuable place to be, and we want to make sure that it's there for all.

I'll wrap up there. I look forward to supporting this committee's work and its mission.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Kurt, for trying to get me back on track by giving me back a couple of minutes.

We will now go to our rounds of questions. We'll start with a six-minute round.

I will pass the floor over to Michelle Ferreri.

Michelle, you have six minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you so much, witnesses, for being here today. I listened to all of you, and that was very powerful testimony.

If I may, I'll start with you, Waneek. May I call you Waneek?

Mrs. Waneek Horn-Miller: *[Pursuant to a motion adopted by the committee on January 30, 2023, this testimony has been deleted. See Minutes of Proceedings for January 30, 2023]*

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: First of all, congratulations on all your achievements. You have such an impressive history. It's really incredible.

You said many things that jumped off the page for me, but one really popped. You said Sport Canada is funding without oversight. I'm wondering if you could expand on that. What would you like to see implemented in terms of oversight when funding dollars are going to these organizations?

Mrs. Waneek Horn-Miller: *[Pursuant to a motion adopted by the committee on January 30, 2023, this testimony has been deleted. See Minutes of Proceedings for January 30, 2023]*

• (1130)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you. I think it's really insightful to look into the accountability aspect of who's watching the watchers, as we've heard in other testimony.

Can you go through your process? Did you file a formal complaint? What was that process like, and where did it go?

Mrs. Waneek Horn-Miller: *[Pursuant to a motion adopted by the committee on January 30, 2023, this testimony has been deleted. See Minutes of Proceedings for January 30, 2023]*

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're going to move to Anita Vandenbeld for the next six minutes.

Anita, you have the floor.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you to all of you for being here.

I'd like to direct my first question to Ms. Horn-Miller.

I want to thank you very much for being here to speak out. I noted in your opening remarks that there was one point when you were told to worry about yourself, and the fact that you are here worrying about everyone coming after you is a testament to your character. We all appreciate your being here.

You talked about people being very vulnerable because they want the dream so badly and about the abuse that comes with that. At the time, what could have been in place? In an ideal world, what should have been there that would have made sport safe for you and made it a better space for you? By extension, what things should be in place today for other young women who are in the same position you are in, particularly intersectional and indigenous young women?

Mrs. Waneek Horn-Miller: *[Pursuant to a motion adopted by the committee on January 30, 2023, this testimony has been deleted. See Minutes of Proceedings for January 30, 2023]*

• (1135)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you very much. I guess a lot of it comes down to what we value. I appreciate that.

The next question I have is for Mr. Weaver. Again, I'm picking up on intersectionality and how you create those safe places. It's about the whole human being, as we just heard.

You've done a lot of work with U.S.A. Rugby. Could you tell us some of the things you've been able to put in place with the safe sport mechanism?

Mr. Kurt Weaver: I would echo the message that what you bring to the field, the pool or the court is heaviness from life. There are items people can't change, be it their sex, sexuality, ethnicity, race or gender. When those become the issue, the sport becomes the place where you don't want to be, and you don't want to spend your time on it. It's too much of a challenge, and most people won't stick around for it.

It's unfortunate when you see elite athletes getting to the top level and being put in this position. They've worked their entire lives on this, yet they're uncomfortable and feel unsafe in this environment. They ask, "What can I do about this?" Then they stick it out, like they stuck out their hamstring injury and stuck out something else that they tried to put behind them, and they perform. That's why I love the message of the holistic athlete. That's the way to do this.

For the safe sport program we dealt with, I think too much of it relied on the good nature of the person in the position of receiving the information, the complaint from the athlete or the anonymous message that came in, and not on the process. That's why making the process efficient and effective is so vital to helping an athlete and ensuring that when a complaint comes in, it's dealt with in an appropriate way.

Too much of this relied on a gatekeeper, and the gatekeeper had an interest in the performance of the team, the sport or the outcome. As we said, it's about the medals. We found the most problems when the gatekeepers of reporting were also the same people responsible for outcomes on the field or on the court. That was the number one challenge we ran into.

My biggest piece of advice would be to look through your processes to see if the reporting is coming in through a channel with someone who has an interest in other items outside of a player's welfare. The player's welfare is more than just the outcome on the field or on the podium. It can't only be that. I think that's where we had some success, in that we were removing people and positions from the process that had anything to do with performance. Of course, you must have performance reporters and the people involved who are with athletes every day, but you should also have an alternative place where athletes can go and where steps will be taken no matter what happens.

I give credit to the safe sport program for the mechanism and process that was put in place, but this relies on our constantly rechecking and evaluating annually, if not more often, for effective outcomes of what we're looking for. Are athletes making reports that are making it to the right place? Are they all taken seriously? Are they all being followed up on?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: In other words, the people who are invested in the athlete winning should not be the same people who they report to.

Mr. Kurt Weaver: It's the age-old idea that you're not going to pull the player who's injured, because you need them for the last five minutes of the game.

They should not be the person who makes the decision of whether the player comes off or not.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now turn it over to Andréanne Larouche for the next six minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses who came today to tell us about their experiences. They contribute to what I hope will become a change in culture for women and girls in sport.

Ms. Clermont-Dion, I saw you react strongly during the testimony from victims. I'm curious to hear what you have to say, as you yourself are a survivor, and yet you are now working with players in the Quebec Major Junior hockey league.

What are your first impressions of what you are hearing from people today?

Dr. Léa Clermont-Dion: I'd say that what I am reacting to is abuse of power. People definitely need to be made more aware of these issues surrounding people in positions of authority and power, but another thing that's needed is to appropriately establish a real and effective system to make coaches and people in positions of power accountable.

In addition to the need to introduce an accountability process, there should be a place people could go to make a complaint rather than fall back on the reporting process. For example: Ms. Horn-Miller's coach should have assumed responsibility for his actions. What I find somewhat fascinating, although it doesn't really surprise me, is the silence and complicity of people who were in positions of authority, and whose behaviour seemed to trivialize incidents of sexual violence.

I'd like to go back to my main message from earlier, which is that blaming the victims is very widespread, as are reports of domination. Having myself made a complaint against a person in a position of authority — I was a trainee and he was my boss — I saw the system at work, even though it was not a sports setting. It was someone who had recognition, and who had power over me.

I was therefore able to see the abrogation of responsibility on the part of a number of people in positions of authority. This kind of behaviour can be seen in all settings. What's therefore required is an independent venue to which complaints can be made when the reporting system is not working.

Of course there is also the fear of reporting, which is related to the fear of displeasing and of not doing the right thing. People also don't want to show that they are not part of the team. That's a change in mentality that has to be made permanent. Discussions and awareness are needed, but also sanctions. Education on its own is not enough; sanctions are needed to

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: In your address, you spoke about education and professionalization, but you also appeared to understand the current mistrust victims have towards the system and the need to have this trust if you're going to complain. People are unfamiliar with the system, but there is also some mistrust. I'd like it if you could address these points.

Many athletes and representatives of organizations came to testify before the committee over the past few weeks. With a view to restoring this trust, most people were asking that an independent commission of inquiry be established to shed light on the toxic situation currently affecting the world of sport.

Given your progress to date, I'd like to know whether you agree with what many athletes and sports groups are demanding from the government, which is to set up an independent commission of inquiry.

Dr. Léa Clermont-Dion: An independent commission of inquiry is indeed absolutely essential. It's one of the long-term solutions. We've discussed it, and the problem is systemic and widespread, not just anecdotal as it has always been perceived previously. What we have heard and seen today is only the tip of the iceberg.

How many people won't speak out? People don't necessarily have the opportunity to talk to us today about what happened. How

many Canadian women have been subjected to countless instances of abuse? It's a very large number.

This commission is therefore necessary. Political will is also needed to change the system in a lasting manner. We are currently experiencing an unprecedented transformation of society. Without the #MeToo movement, we wouldn't be condemning this violence today, and yet it's necessary.

The solution will require more than just the traditional legal avenue. When you're a victim, whether an athlete or otherwise, what options are there to make a complaint? There are the courts. However, I believe that in many communities, people don't trust the police, and rightly so. So that first option is not always appropriate. The other is a system that strikes us as rotten and unreliable, when all is said and done.

This inquiry is absolutely essential if we are to find realistic and appropriate ways of moving things forward.

• (1145)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: There's a great deal of talk at the moment about a review of the Canadian Sport Policy, which is to be tabled by the Minister of Sport in February.

However, if this policy is reviewed without an independent commission of inquiry that would look at the entire system from the outside, how could it possibly respond to what victims are asking for?

Dr. Léa Clermont-Dion: That's a good question.

What we really need to do is listen to the victims, who may come up with various solutions. We need to return to the base for that, because it needs more than a minor review. Extensive consultation across Canada is required to better understand these highly complex and sensitive problems, which are so hard to pin down within each organization. There's a lot of housekeeping to do.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'll now pass it over to Leah Gazan for six minutes.

Go ahead, Leah.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you so much, Chair.

Thank you to everybody here today, and thank you, Waneek, for sharing your story.

As I've said in other panels, everybody is shocked, but we knew about this. There were so many documentaries over the years, and people were complacent, including federal governments, provincial governments and the sports community. That's unacceptable.

Waneek, you said you were told to be quiet before you began. This seems to be a common occurrence. When you went forward to try to do something, you were told again by veterans, coaches and officials to just focus on yourself. Is this common practice?

Mrs. Waneek Horn-Miller: *[Pursuant to a motion adopted by the committee on January 30, 2023, this testimony has been deleted. See Minutes of Proceedings for January 30, 2023]*

Ms. Leah Gazan: You said something that I found grotesque. You went forward and filed a complaint against the very coach who was funded by Sport Canada in an executive position.

Mrs. Waneek Horn-Miller: *[Pursuant to a motion adopted by the committee on January 30, 2023, this testimony has been deleted. See Minutes of Proceedings for January 30, 2023]*

Ms. Leah Gazan: As we go through the testimony, it's becoming very clear to me.... I'll give you an example. In Manitoba, we have a child welfare system riddled with issues. Kids actually die in the system in Manitoba. Most of the kids in the child welfare system are vulnerable to the systems that have been put in place, which fail to protect them. It seems to me that all the systems—Sport Canada and all these different organizations—have been put in a position. They are not protecting children or young adults. It has become more clear to me.

In Manitoba, we have something called the children's advocate. It's an independent body from the child welfare system and the province.

Do you think having a totally independent body is critical to ensuring the safety of young children and young adults in sport?

• (1150)

Mrs. Waneek Horn-Miller: *[Pursuant to a motion adopted by the committee on January 30, 2023, this testimony has been deleted. See Minutes of Proceedings for January 30, 2023]*

Ms. Leah Gazan: I have one other question.

You said people give up their lives for sport and that you're employees of the federal government. You have no benefits. You have no protections. You have no job security. You have no human rights protections.

The federal government is currently funding organizations that clearly have not responded adequately to address the crisis. Do you think the federal government needs to look at its funding structure and at who's being funded currently and restructure it to respond to this crisis? I know people have been calling for an independent review. Do you think we could find out how to do that in an independent review?

Mrs. Waneek Horn-Miller: *[Pursuant to a motion adopted by the committee on January 30, 2023, this testimony has been deleted. See Minutes of Proceedings for January 30, 2023]*

The Chair: Thank you so much.

As you can see, we're short on time. It will be three minutes, three minutes, one minute and one minute.

Anna, you have three minutes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for sharing your stories with us. I know it's not easy.

I'm going to address my question to Ms. Horn-Miller.

You mentioned the Time magazine article. How did that come about?

Mrs. Waneek Horn-Miller: *[Pursuant to a motion adopted by the committee on January 30, 2023, this testimony has been deleted. See Minutes of Proceedings for January 30, 2023]*

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Do you think that hindered your opportunities?

Mrs. Waneek Horn-Miller: *[Pursuant to a motion adopted by the committee on January 30, 2023, this testimony has been deleted. See Minutes of Proceedings for January 30, 2023]*

• (1155)

Mrs. Anna Roberts: You mentioned that the coaches who abuse continue to go on coaching and that Sport Canada is obviously dysfunctional. That's from the conversations we're getting from our witnesses, not just you. Many other witnesses are saying the same thing. They're dysfunctional, and I have to agree. An independent body would help prevent these coaches from continuing.

Would you agree that to ensure this behaviour doesn't continue, they should be charged?

Mrs. Waneek Horn-Miller: *[Pursuant to a motion adopted by the committee on January 30, 2023, this testimony has been deleted. See Minutes of Proceedings for January 30, 2023]*

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now move to Emmanuella for three minutes. She is online.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to take a moment to thank our three witnesses today.

My questions are for Madame Clermont-Dion. Then, if I have time, I'll come back to Mr. Weaver.

[Translation]

Ms. Clermont-Dion, you talked about the system and what's needed to repair it. You also mentioned education and awareness, and I fully agree with you on that score.

All the recommendations people have made so far are really about enabling victims to talk about what happened to them.

What we want for the future is to be able to begin immediately to protect children and adolescents who are entering the world of sport.

[English]

We want a sports system that is safer for young people and kids who are entering sport.

You mentioned having a transparent process in place so that people know what the steps would be if something were to happen to them and where to go to complain. Can you go further into the details of what a process such as this should include?

[*Translation*]

Dr. Léa Clermont-Dion: Thank you for your question.

The process is very important from the moment a complaint has been received, whether through the court system or elsewhere.

First responders should be properly trained to handle complaints, by which we mean showing empathy, listening and being kind. You may well say that this is subjective, but there are techniques that can be used and taught if the first responders are properly trained. Coaching throughout any process like this is essential.

The responders therefore need to know about active listening. Instead of trying to blame the victims, which sometimes happens in the criminal system, the police and others need to use interview techniques that involve active listening. That's the first thing.

Then, I think the complainants need to be properly informed about what they can expect, because some of the steps involved in making a complaint can be traumatic. I'm referring here to the fact that people may experience a new form of victimization when they testify and tell their story, and that can make them vulnerable during the process. It's important to really pay attention to that and to ensure that an overwhelming amount of testimony is required from the victim. One session should be enough.

To be sure, the victims need to trust the complaint system. The more they know what's involved and by whom the process is being conducted, the better things will go. For example, the process could be carried out by experts in sexual violence or psychological violence. The victims need to trust them, and I believe that requires systematic psychological support to help the complainants. When a complaint is made, it can elicit all kinds of difficult things, and without support from a psychologist with listening skills, the process can create a lot of anxiety.

It's also important to ensure that launching the complaint process will not be harmful to the athlete's future career. That may mean sanctioning those who allowed certain incidents to happen.

I know that it's complicated and that I could go on at greater length, but in terms of an answer, that's a good start.

● (1200)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're getting tight on time. We will have Andréanne for as close to a minute as possible and Leah for as close to a minute as possible.

Andréanne, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you once again for your testimony, Mr. Weaver and Ms. Horn-Miller.

Ms. Clermont-Dion, you concluded your preliminary comments by launching an appeal for action from federal elected representatives to put an end to what I call token feminism. Can you give us a summary of what would constitute concrete and truly feminist forms of action?

Dr. Léa Clermont-Dion: The education and training I was talking about needs to instill concepts that are currently lacking. Things like toxic masculinity and rape culture have to be explained, for example. Most people don't know that these forms of behaviour trivialize sexual violence.

I believe that what happened with Hockey Canada and other instances we've heard about are examples of rape culture. It's important to appropriate words and concepts that are being bandied about these days, and to deconstruct them with the help of team members as a form of prevention.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: An independent commission of inquiry should also be established.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll move to Leah.

Leah, you have one minute.

Ms. Leah Gazan: My last question is for Dr. Clermont-Dion.

You spoke about education. Do you think education for coaches provided by an independent body with articulation agreements between the provinces would be helpful? I ask that because although I know education is in provincial jurisdiction, athletes come from across the country, so there have to be some sort of agreed-upon standards. Do you think that would be helpful?

[*Translation*]

Dr. Léa Clermont-Dion: I think so, but it would be especially important to make sure that athletes are involved in awareness training. It would be very interesting to see how a program that would allow athletes who have survived such experiences to contribute to the democratization of this issue and to raising awareness of it.

I believe that interventions, when they are sincere, can affect people and make them more aware. That being the case, why not do more consultation with athletes, so that their voices can be heard in riveting testimony, and that they could even be offered financial compensation? That could turn out to be an interesting option, particularly from the repair perspective, because prevention, education and awareness are also part of the restorative process. It's therapeutic.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

On behalf of the committee, I'd really like to thank Waneek, Léa and Kurt. Thank you so much for bringing us your testimony.

We are going to suspend to allow the three other panellists to join us.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1205)

The Chair: As everybody is taking their seats, I would like to welcome our next panel for today.

On our second panel, we have, from Athletics Canada, Chris Winter, director of domestic programs and safe sport; and from Volleyball Canada, Mark Eckert, president and chief executive officer. They are attending online. Here in the room, from the Sport Information Resource Centre, we have Debra Gassewitz, president and chief executive officer.

You each have five minutes for your opening statements. Once you see me spinning, I would ask that you wind down your comments within 15 seconds.

I'll turn it over right now to Mark Eckert.

Mark, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Mark Eckert (President and Chief Executive Officer, Volleyball Canada): Thank you to the committee for inviting me to speak on behalf of Volleyball Canada.

I have listened to the statements and stories of those who have shared their experiences with this committee so far, and wow, they have been very powerful. I'm hoping that I have the opportunity to speak about some ways that we are working toward positive change in this space.

First, I'd like to share some background from our sport.

Volleyball has a high female participation rate, especially at the youth levels. In 2022, our youth national championships had more than double the female players compared with male players. Female participation was also higher at our beach volleyball national championships, perhaps inspired by the success of our women's teams at the world championship level.

Canada's women's teams and programs have progressed greatly on the international stage in recent years. It's something Canadians can be proud of, but it's not all good news. Unfortunately, most of these young athletes have been coached only by males, and often, youth volleyball is where their journey ends.

We have to ask ourselves some difficult questions. What are the barriers for female athletes and coaches? How can Volleyball Canada and its partners break those barriers for women coaches and referees? How can we make our sport more appealing and welcoming to women of all ages in all roles? Really, first and foremost, how do we make the sport environment as safe as possible for all, especially for those who have felt vulnerable or have been abused in the past?

Volleyball Canada has not been immune to the challenges facing sport. The work to make our sport safer is ongoing but by no means complete. Here are a few of the initiatives that are contributing to a safer sport.

Volleyball Canada requires all of its participants, as many sports do, to take safe sport training, and through coach education, we have incorporated the safe sport program and respect in sport program throughout the system.

Volleyball Canada was one of the first NSOs to sign on to the abuse-free sport program. It's crucial—and we hear this over and over—that participants have a third party mechanism and are guaranteed that their complaints are being heard without judgment and without prejudice.

It's a system that is evolving, and I am encouraged by the buy-in and participation from our partners at the provincial level and their affiliated clubs. We cannot make meaningful change without working together.

Our provincial and territorial associations also recognize the importance of working together at the policy level. We have implemented pan-Canadian policies to promote consistency in how we deal with issues across the country.

With the assistance of our funding partners, Volleyball Canada has teamed up with athletics and swimming to create a safe sport tool for youth. Our goal is to develop and implement a digital platform that promotes safe sport education and engagement for athletes between the ages of 11 and 18. This platform will be used to increase awareness among young athletes on different aspects of safe sport, such as maltreatment prevention, mental health support and nutrition. We have engaged with our provincial and territorial partners as well as clubs to get their input on the project to ensure it's a successful collaboration.

We have also been fortunate enough to work with associations such as Canadian Women and Sport on the gender equity playbook. It helped us to look inward before we embarked on any changes to the external strategies and programs.

Volleyball Canada is in the midst of independently led culture audits—some call them environmental reviews—of a few of our programs. These audits look at how we can be more inclusive and how we can serve our athletes better as players and people. I believe that culture audits are just as important as financial audits, which are typical in sport, and they need to be done on a regular basis.

With the assistance of our partners at the Canadian Olympic Committee, we have embarked on a diversity, equity and inclusion review led by Deloitte. It's already proving to be an eye-opening experience for all involved.

We have women in leadership roles, including our women's indoor head coach and our sitting women's Paralympic head coach. More than 40% of our board is female. We are adding more female staff at the development and next-generation stages, but it's not enough.

We need to make the pathway to success clear and deliberate. We need to work together and demonstrate that our sport is a place where girls and women can thrive and succeed throughout their lives and careers. I am the father of two daughters who have been involved in several organized sports, so there is a personal as well as professional side to this quest to keep athletes safe and to make our sport more inclusive and welcoming.

• (1210)

With purposeful system-wide improvements from the grassroots club level to our national teams, we will witness the change needed to keep our sport relevant, inclusive and enjoyable for all.

I thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you so much. It's pretty impressive, since volleyball doesn't have timing, that you went right down to the five minutes. Great job.

Christopher Winter, we'll go to you now for five minutes.

Mr. Christopher Winter (Director, Domestic Programs and Safe Sport, Athletics Canada): Good afternoon, and thank you to the committee for the opportunity to speak with you all today.

My name is Chris Winter. I serve as the director of domestic programs and safe sport with Athletics Canada, the national sport organization for track and field, para athletics, road running, cross-country, race walking, and mountain and trail running. I personally have been involved in the sport of athletics all my life, first joining a track club at the age of nine. I've had the opportunity to represent our country at world championships, the Commonwealth Games and the 2016 Olympic Games.

Athletics Canada is an organization that believes strongly in ensuring diverse and accessible sport, especially through the gender diversity lens. It has in its strategic plan to 2028 the goal to continue to increase diversity, including gender equity, across all roles, as well as to continually improve safe sport policies and governance.

At its core, the sport of athletics and its competition structure provide for equal opportunity to both men and women. Our national team programs provide for a similar equal opportunity for both men and women. With that in mind, a priority of the organization has been to ensure that the boardroom and our national office staff resemble the diversity that our sport sees on the field of play.

In terms of our coaching membership, we see relatively equal numbers of men and women coaching at the grassroots and club levels. However, those numbers tilt heavily towards men at the national level, so we have work to do.

Athletics Canada wants to be recognized as a leader in the growth and development of gender equity, and over the past few years, it was able to take advantage of a Sport Canada grant program to work with Canadian Women and Sport to put the organization through a gender equity audit. This was followed by the formulation of a gender equity action plan that ensures Athletics Canada works toward being a world-leading organization by providing an environment that ensures gender equity and an environment that's safe for all levels throughout our sport; reflects our members by ensuring that we consciously create an organization that is representative of our membership base in all ways; encourages women and

men to work together in a sport where they participate equally at all levels, creating success together; and maintains a pathway for women to occupy positions at all levels of office and coaching through a concerted effort.

Recommendations have been produced in the areas of governance, leadership and strategy; recruitment, selection and promotion; values and culture; measurement and tracking; and growing the pool.

One area that was identified as a priority was recruiting and supporting more female coaches so they rise up to the national team and high-performance level. As such, Athletics Canada launched its national female coach mentorship program in the fall of 2021 with great success. That program saw six female coach mentors provide leadership to 16 female coach mentees. In 2022-23, this program has grown again. We now have 11 female coach mentors working with 22 female coach mentees.

Since the establishment of these recommendations, Athletics Canada has also created a diversity, equity and inclusion committee to help drive the necessary change. Over the past 12 months, the DEI committee has been primarily focused on developing a policy of transgender and gender diversity inclusion, which was approved by our board and membership at recent meetings in Ottawa. Attention will now turn to the gender equity action plan.

In terms of safe sport, athletics has not gone without its share of challenges. In 2015, in response to these issues, Athletics Canada was one of the first NSOs, if not the very first, to institute an independent third party to receive complaints of violations of Athletics Canada's Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport. Since the inception of the office of the commissioner, the policies, governance and procedures have continually been reviewed and improved. A full suite of policies now exists to ensure not only a safe sporting environment for all participants but also a proper mechanism in place to address any code of conduct violations.

Examples of those policies include athlete protection guidelines, screening policy and screening policy requirements, a whistleblower policy and a diversity, equity and inclusion policy. Athletics Canada is also in the process of moving to abuse-free sport for all national-level sport complaints, but will retain its office of the commissioner to provide an independent reporting mechanism for complaints that fall outside of that office's jurisdiction.

On the education and prevention front, which Mark referenced, Athletics Canada is working collaboratively with the sports of volleyball and swimming on the development of a youth safe sport education program designed specifically for youth from 11 to 18 years old. Funding has been provided through the COC. Our hope is that, once built, other NSOs will be able to adopt this program for their own athletes.

I want to close by saying that as the director for domestic programs and safe sport, I am responsible for the safety of our athletes. My priority is to ensure that they are participating in a sport that is safe and supportive, and to ensure that if any of them feel uncomfortable or find themselves in a situation where they believe they are being mistreated or abused, they have the ability to speak up. We must break the culture of silence in sport. I know that I speak for all our organization when I say that we are willing to do our part and support what is necessary to make sport the positive, safe space it needs to be.

Thank you very much.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move over to Debra Gassewitz.

Debra, I'm looking at your speaking notes. I may get you to cut it off a few minutes before the five-minute mark. I'll pass it over to you for five minutes.

Ms. Debra Gassewitz (President and Chief Executive Officer, Sport Information Resource Centre): Thank you, Madam Chair and the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, for inviting me to speak today on behalf of the Sport Information Resource Centre. I'll refer to it throughout as SIRC.

To the survivors who have come forward and shared their experiences, and to those who have not, my heart goes out to each and every one of you, as no one should have to go through the abuses and harms you have suffered. As a parent, as a volunteer, as a girl who loved sport growing up and today as someone working in sport, I firmly believe we need to do whatever we can to ensure that no one—especially children—is maltreated or harmed in any way.

My reason for coming here today is that I believe we can make a difference. Why? Because I'm watching behaviours change.

SIRC is Canada's leader in advancing sport through knowledge and evidence, and our role is to help answer questions, facilitate conversations and share knowledge with the sport sector. We're not an advocacy group. We're a resource centre known for neutrality and our desire to help find credible information, to listen and to learn.

For example, 10 years ago, concussions were not well known in the public sphere. Athletes, coaches, parents, sports officials and media all seemed to embrace the “tough it up” mentality. In 2016, the government, led by Governor General David Johnston at the time, embraced “we can do better”. The ministers made it a priority to increase concussion awareness and the management and prevention of concussions, and to collect data so we could continue learning. Today, all national sport organizations have mandatory concussion policies, the provinces have implemented concussion proto-

cols, Ontario has Rowan's Law Day and the FPT endorsed the fourth week of September to be concussion awareness week so that we continue learning.

Addressing concussions through research and evidence is one part of making sports safer for Canada's athletes. Safe sport is more than just physical safety.

We've heard about the horrendous harms and maltreatment experienced by our athletes, and we know our government has been listening—

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Madam Chair, the interpretation isn't working.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Gassewitz, please stop for one moment.

Is everything okay with interpretation? They switched over, so we'll keep on going.

Ms. Gassewitz, if you could, go back to the line before and then go for it.

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: It's a good line too.

We know that government has been listening too. In 2019, the ministers endorsed the “Red Deer Declaration for the Prevention of Harassment, Abuse and Discrimination in Sport”. Following a series of pan-Canadian sports summits, the UCCMS was released. Fast-forward to 2022, and OSIC, an independent arm of the SDR-CC, has been launched to administer the UCCMS.

These swift actions show that the government has been listening and helping, but more needs to be done, which brings us to the renewal of the Canadian sport policy. In February 2022, the Canadian sport policy and work groups contracted SIRC to help endorse and find information about the next policy. Since then, more than 5,000 Canadians coast to coast to coast participated in 28 engagements, and an e-survey available in English, French, Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun was held.

We heard from Canadians that sport is an integral part of health and culture in Canada. Sport was described as important for physical, mental, emotional and community health. It was considered an integral part of our national fabric, a fabric that holds and brings us together. Over and over, we heard about the importance of sport as a driver of healthy active lifestyles that connect to enjoyment and to Canadian culture.

We also heard that to create these benefits for Canadians, sport needs to be safe, positive and values-based. Values and ethics came up as the top-rated priority for community sport for 53% of survey respondents. Values and ethics were also among the top three priorities in competitive sport, with athlete development topping the list at 68%. Respondents also expressed widespread concern over the perception of the “win at all costs” culture that puts athletes' performances ahead of their health, safety and well-being.

This is all very important as it goes forward, and the participants emphasized that safe sport requires more than developmentally appropriate and technically sound programs. It requires a focus on mandatory safe sport training and anti-racism and cultural awareness training for everyone in sport. Here, we stress “everyone”, meaning the participants, the athletes, the parents, the coaches, the officials, the administrators and the leaders. That was loud and clear: It was everyone.

In addition to education and accountability, the launch of OSIC was very important. There's a clear need for messaging, resources and uniformity across the system.

The Canadian sport policy consultations indicated a clear desire to see Canada as an international leader in safe sport, so what can government do? We need to start by listening to Canadians, especially our survivors. We need to collaborate and make safe sport a government priority, and we need to fund sustainable programs to promote safe sport at all levels of sport. Education and awareness initiatives, supported by data, are needed to change behaviour for the benefit of everyone in sport.

Thanks for listening. We want to help.

The Chair: That's perfect. Thank you so much.

We'll be starting with our six-minute rounds, and the first round goes to Michelle Ferreri.

You have six minutes, Michelle.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses. I really appreciate it.

Mr. Winter, do you want a national judicial inquiry into sport?

Mr. Christopher Winter: First of all, I think that anything our athletes are asking for is something we should be listening to. At this point, the details on what that would look like are still limited, but it's certainly something we would support if we felt that it would be the right step forward and if our athletes were asking for it.

• (1225)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I just wanted to point something out. I know that you spoke a lot about having an equal number of male and female coaches on a more local level but not on a national level. You've said that you're working towards having more females, but I want to say on the record that I've spoken with a lot of survivors, and there are definitely as many abusive women coaches as there are men coaches.

I think it's really important to clear the record: Just because someone is a woman doesn't mean she's not as abusive. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Christopher Winter: Yes, that's a good point. I mean, when we look at the stats we have within our commissioner's office, the vast majority of the complaints come from female athletes regarding male coaches, but that's not without exception.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Obviously the ratio would factor in, I think, because there are more males, so wouldn't there be more...? I think that's interesting.

Three coaches from Ontario have received lifetime bans from Athletics Canada. A new whistle-blower policy started in 2020. In track and field, can you provide the organization chart of governing bodies?

Mr. Christopher Winter: Yes, we could.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Do you want to do it now, or would you like to table that later for the committee to see?

Mr. Christopher Winter: I don't have a document in front of me, but we have our structure within the sports system in Canada. Athletics Canada is the NSO, and we have our provincial and territorial member branches. Then underneath that are our clubs and independent athletes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: If you could table that with the committee, it would be really wonderful. I think we need to see that.

Mr. Winter, it certainly feels at this point, based on testimony, like the fox is protecting the henhouse. Survivors are going to complain, but the people they are complaining to are the ones being funded to keep the system in place and the toxic culture in place. We're just trying to figure out that process right now and understand where money is going.

In particular, I'm curious if you could release the fees that are received by Athletics Canada from local clubs. What is that amount of money?

Mr. Christopher Winter: It comes from our member branches. It would be \$15 per person for a member of a provincial-territorial branch, transferred to Athletics Canada.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Can you simplify that for people? If I'm a person at a gymnastics club in, say, Ontario and I'm paying my fee, how much of it is going to Athletics Canada?

Mr. Christopher Winter: Just as a point of clarity, “athletics” is an international term for track and field. We're not part of gymnastics.

If you're in a track and field club or if you're an individual athlete, you are going to pay a branch membership fee to a provincial branch. In Ontario, that's Athletics Ontario. That amount may be \$100, say, for simplicity's sake. Then \$15 of that would be transferred to Athletics Canada.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Okay, so there is money going directly from local clubs to you guys.

What's the process, then, if somebody has a complaint with Athletics Canada? Can you walk us through how that would be done?

Mr. Christopher Winter: As I mentioned in my opening statement, we have the Athletics Canada commissioner's office, which was established in 2015 as an independent office to receive complaints primarily from the national level, but—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I'm sorry. You said "independent office". Who funds that?

Mr. Christopher Winter: We fund it.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Then how is it independent?

Mr. Christopher Winter: It operates as a separate system. We don't share email addresses. We don't share an office. We don't share any sort of resources with the complaint mechanism. Those are received and managed on an independent basis.

It was the best thing we had going forward, and we're excited about OSIC coming on board to provide an additional level of independence. However, the opportunity that we had at the time was to take that step, and we did that without a government mandate. We felt it was the best thing at the time for the sport. We're really pleased with the results, and we feel that it took a couple of years for our athletes to truly understand and have confidence in the system.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Are you happy right now with the way the complaint process is run?

Mr. Christopher Winter: It's not perfect. That's why we feel that, at least at the national level, being able to adopt OSIC is a positive step forward. The challenge we see with the new abuse-free sport system is that it still just maintains the national level. If we look at our historical complaints, the number of complaints taking place at the national level, at least within athletics, is actually quite small.

• (1230)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Why would somebody complain if they know nothing is going to happen, which has been the experience we have heard from witnesses?

Mr. Christopher Winter: A number of cases taken on by the commissioner's office have happily led to lifetime bans of our coaches. We're certainly working to make that process as transparent and fair as possible to make sure that our athletes feel safe and that there is no fear of retribution. Having a disconnect from the national office and the national staff ensures that.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I have just one final—

The Chair: Just hang tight.

We'll go on now to Jenna Sudds.

Jenna, you have six minutes.

Ms. Jenna Sudds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you very much to all of the witnesses.

I'll go back to Mr. Winter. I want to dig a bit deeper into what the last member was asking about.

In 2015, you set up your commissioner to address issues within Athletics Canada, as they were brought forward, of your own ac-

cord. Can you speak to the impact that has had from 2015 up to most recently when OSIC was established?

Mr. Christopher Winter: What it provides us is that arm's-length reach and a piece of independence. I think it was mentioned earlier that our sports are very small and everyone knows everyone, or there's one degree of separation. For someone like me to take on a complaint like that and manage it in an independent way is nearly impossible. We needed to set up an office, and again, that was the only thing available to us at that time. It required our funding because there wasn't anyone else stepping forward at that time to provide funding.

We hired experts in this process who have experience in the law. They're retired judges or current judges. They've taken on that process to accept complaints and manage them in an independent way. They hire their own investigators, and at the end of the day what we receive is a final report. We are then required to administer the disciplinary process as determined in the report. Obviously there's a range of options that the commissioner's office has at its disposal, but in the case of more egregious issues, they lead to a lifetime suspension. That is publicly posted on our website, and you can see on the "Safe Sport" section of our website the coaches who have faced those suspensions.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: That's fabulous.

Fast-forward to June when OSIC was established and up and running. I believe you're fully signed on to OSIC. Am I correct?

Mr. Christopher Winter: We'll be starting on April 1. That's when we fully make that transition.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: What will happen to your current commission as it stands now? What is the added value there, or why, as you referenced, are you excited that OSIC will now be available to you?

Mr. Christopher Winter: We'll still retain the commissioner's office for a couple of things. It still acts as the body for any complaints against team selection or team funding. We still need to have that, as OSIC doesn't accept those complaints, so we'll still require them. We also need to maintain the office to hear complaints that come from the club and provincial levels. More and more provinces are onboarding their own independent safe sport offices, but there are still many that don't. We feel that it's still in our sports' best interest and our athletes' best interest to maintain the independent office to hear complaints so that they have a robust body to make those complaints to.

Maybe you can ask the question about OSIC again so that I get it right.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: You referenced that you're excited OSIC will now be available to you, so I wanted an explanation of why that is.

Mr. Christopher Winter: Excited may be a poor choice of terms, but it is a positive step forward. Obviously, any additional funding we can have to help support safe sport is very welcome. We're severely under-resourced when it comes to safe sport across all of our NSOs, so providing this is a positive step forward. It certainly will mean, from the perspective of our athletes, having an additional level of independence, which we welcome.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: Thank you very much.

My next question is for Ms. Gassewitz.

One of your recommendations was to listen and the second was to make safe sport a government priority. As we've heard today and I think as you referenced, OSIC was established in June and is just starting to get rolling, which in my mind is a very positive step in showing our commitment to safe sport. I'm wondering if you can share with us what else our government can do to make safe sport a government priority.

• (1235)

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: Let's build on the experience of watching how concussions have had a huge impact. That was shared a lot because the government kept it a priority. It meant the funding was sustainable so that people could develop programs, implement programs, monitor programs, evaluate and continue to grow. It meant that awareness kept going. It allowed awareness to go through all different avenues and levels of sport—our national and provincial-territorial levels—to our communities so that it could have an impact.

Building on that, I would say the same thing applies here. Going forward, it should not be a one-off thing such that this year this is the topic we're all talking about just because it hit the media. For it to really change and for us to really have an impact on society, I think government keeping it a priority for a longer term is the biggest part. Then you can allow it to go through those natural stages of behaviour change.

Having a one-off, short-term thing is not going to change behaviour. It's going to give a check mark and will give the media a story. To give the long-term investment and allow the different regions, different provinces and different stakeholders to adapt how they need to, government—and that's all governments—needs to say, “Yes, for our community, this is staying a priority.”

At that level, I would say to keep it a priority for the long term, keep the sustainable funding going so it's not just about this year's funding and keep telling the story. Make sure it comes out. Look at the evaluation, be part of the process and implement those changes. Take it as a way of learning. I think everything is an end.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're going to move to Andréanne.

Andréanne, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being with us today to help us understand why victims have no trust in the system, among other things.

Mr. Winter, before we get to other topics, I would ask you to tell me a little bit more about the structure of your organization. Who are the voting members of Athletics Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. Christopher Winter: The voting members of Athletics Canada are our provincial-territorial member branches.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Do they hold the balance of power in your sport? If not, who does?

[*English*]

Mr. Christopher Winter: I'm sorry. I'm not sure I understand the question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: We've talked about the voting members of Athletics Canada. Who holds the power when it comes to making decisions? We're trying to understand the leadership structure of your organization.

I would also like to ask you how the members of your board of directors are chosen and elected.

[*English*]

Mr. Christopher Winter: In terms of who holds the balance of power, we have a board of directors who are elected through elections. After some of the governance reviews we've had, we've looked to identify the areas and gaps we may have in our governance to seek out various roles and responsibilities, whether it's in law, marketing or other areas. We're also taking a look at this from a diversity perspective to ensure that the diversity we see on the field of play is represented in the boardroom and that people from all walks of life are represented in the boardroom.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I would like to go back to how you follow up on reports of abuse, and for you to explain a little bit about the process.

Currently, what is your role following the filing of complaints? How long does it take to resolve situations? What do you do when you are told of sexual misconduct against a complainant?

• (1240)

[*English*]

Mr. Christopher Winter: As I said, we have a third party commissioner's office that manages those complaints. If a complaint is made to me, the first thing I do is direct it to the commissioner's office. That's the place that receives them. Again, the commissioner's office can receive complaints regarding maltreatment, but it can also hear complaints about athlete agreements, eligibility decisions, issues around representative team selections and funding.

That is managed through an independent process. They have their own staff who manage it. Currently, we have two commissioners—one female, one male—who both have expertise in law. They manage that. It's required that they hire independent investigators to complete an investigation, and then they compile a report. At the very end of the process, that report is submitted to Athletics Canada for posting on the website. Any decisions made in that report are then carried out. We're responsible for following any decisions made in that report.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Winter, you're the one funding this office, though. You said so.

Do you understand that the independence of this office could be questioned and that this could lead to a lack of trust from victims?

[English]

Mr. Christopher Winter: Yes, absolutely. We would certainly welcome an independent body to help fund that. However, without that coming in, we're not left with a lot of options. We tried to set up the framework in such a way that it is as independent as we could possibly make it, but without funding coming from an external body, that's simply not possible.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Mr. Winter, I want to make sure I understand. Are you a signatory to Abuse Free Sport? If so, since when?

[English]

Mr. Christopher Winter: As I mentioned earlier, we will be officially onboarded on April 1, 2023.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Mr. Winter, do you also feel that, in order to continue to move things forward, you could have put the athletes more at the heart of your decisions?

Have you taken any steps to comply with the Canadian Sport Governance Code?

[English]

Mr. Christopher Winter: I'm sorry, but I don't understand your question. Could you clarify it?

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: I'm going to put it another way.

At the moment, athletes are bemoaning the fact that they have not been consulted enough. This is said to be the case as well with regard to the revision of the Canadian Sport Policy, which will be tabled by the minister in February.

The victims are calling for an independent judicial inquiry into sport to really get to the bottom of the situation and allow victims to trust the system again.

I would like to hear your comments on this and on how the victims can be given a hearing.

[English]

The Chair: What I'm going to do, because we have more time, is come back to you, Andr anne, for that question. We'll move over to Leah for her six minutes, and then for your follow-up questions, we'll have time available to you.

Leah, you have six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

My first question is for Mr. Winter. I'm going to read from a CBC article from February 10, 2020, entitled "Athletics Canada Athlete Council says track body failed alleged victim of sexual abuse". It says:

The Athletics Canada Athlete Council condemned Canada's track and field governing body Monday in the wake of allegations surrounding former national coach Dave Scott-Thomas.

The open letter from the athlete council came two days after former student-athlete Megan Brown came forward in a Globe and Mail story alleging that Scott-Thomas, a former University of Guelph coach, groomed her for a sexual relationship when she was 17.

Athletics Canada said in a statement Saturday that the Globe and Mail report was "deeply disturbing," but claimed no complaint had been made directly to the national organizing body or its independent commissioner's office.

However, the Athletics Canada Athlete Council, which was founded in 2012 to advocate for athletes within Athletics Canada, said the organization failed to take action when Brown needed its help.

"This inaction and dismissal perpetrated a culture of disempowerment of sex abuse victims," the athlete council said in the letter. "Furthermore, the continued appraisal of Mr. Scott-Thomas, and denial of any wrongdoing on the part of [Athletics Canada], only reinforced his position of power over the victim[s]."

I share this with you because you mentioned in your testimony that you oversee safe sport policies and governance. Is that correct?

• (1245)

Mr. Christopher Winter: Yes, I look after the safe sport portfolio, and any governance is obviously shared among the board and—

Ms. Leah Gazan: Have other instances of sexual abuse been reported to you while overseeing safe sport—clearly serious allegations, including this one—where you failed to act?

Mr. Christopher Winter: I've been in this role for two years. We've had the commissioner's office manage those complaints, and we've seen other complaints of sexual abuse come forward—

Ms. Leah Gazan: What have you done in response to them? Has there been immediate discipline, or has there been what Ms. Brown indicated, with the organization failing to take action?

Mr. Christopher Winter: In the more recent cases, immediate suspensions and lifetime suspensions have been given to those individuals. I apologize to Megan Brown for the lack of support she faced.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you for your candid responses.

My next question is for Ms. Gassewitz.

Your organization gives out safe sport grants. Is that right?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: No.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Oh, you don't. Okay.

Has it ever come to your attention that grants were given to clubs that we found out...? For example, we know Action Canada had some involvement. If it came to your attention that SIRC gave out grants to a club that was enabling child abuse, what would your response be? Can you give me an example?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: I'm just double-checking that I understand your question in this case. SIRC is a resource centre, and our goal is to focus on education. I'm just double-checking on that so that I understand the piece you're asking about.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'm asking this because I know the Government of Canada has created the new Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner. You mentioned OSIC. This was done under Minister of Sport Pascale St-Onge, who believes this is a good process. However, we've heard very conflicting testimony about it. Athletes who have experienced abuse are saying otherwise.

I've been taught to always believe victims. If victims are coming forward and saying that it's inadequate, do you think it's important that we listen to them?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: I always think it's important to be listening, especially as we're a resource centre. You're absolutely right that listening is important. Even during the creation of the UCCMS, athletes worked together with the University of Toronto to pull together the study that was done on the maltreatment of the athletes. That was brought forward, and I think it was really important to share that information.

To your point on information, I think learning, hearing and sharing it are valuable.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I would argue that responding with action is as well.

One of the things that I have been recommending.... I used the child welfare system in Manitoba as an example this morning. We know the child welfare system is supposed to protect children, but there are a lot of instances where it has failed. From what I'm learning—and this is very new for me, to be honest; I'm learning about the governance—the governance structure in the way it's currently in place is failing to protect children, young adults and athletes in sports.

Do you think it would be helpful to have an independent third body? In Manitoba, we have the children's advocate, where children go. It's completely independent and completely independently funded. Athletes and victims of violence could go to that third body for independent review and oversight.

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: There are several pieces you brought forward. I'll try to make my way through a couple of the questions.

To the question of hearing from everybody, obviously we're a huge supporter of due diligence and anything else we can hear. Different voices bring different experiences that we want to bring forward. I think that's very important—

• (1250)

The Chair: I'm going to ask you to hold on, because Leah has one more opportunity.

We're going to our next round, but in our next round we'll have to reduce our time once again, with four minutes, four minutes, two minutes and two minutes. That's what we're going with now.

Anna, you have the floor for four minutes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a question for Mr. Winter.

Could you please tell to me how many complaints you have had from athletes since 2015?

Mr. Christopher Winter: Specifically with regard to maltreatment in sport, we've had, I believe, 12.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Have there been any non-disclosure agreements or financial settlements during that time?

Mr. Christopher Winter: There have not.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Are these cases still pending?

Mr. Christopher Winter: No. The cases that have been ruled on are published on our website. They are made public for people to read.

Obviously, there are some reports that, due to privacy reasons around protecting our complainants, we do not publish. Again, that issue is dealt with between the commissioner's office and the athletes.

Those 12 cases have been reported on.

I'm sorry. If there was another question there, I missed it.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Were there any financial statements? Did anyone receive any financial compensation?

Mr. Christopher Winter: No, there weren't.

In terms of non-disclosure agreements, it was AthletesCAN, I believe, that helped lead a process to ensure that non-disclosure agreements were not included in any sort of athlete agreements that were signed. Athletics Canada was one of the first of a handful of NSOs that adopted that agreement template.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Can we get that testimony? Is it possible for you to share that with us?

Mr. Christopher Winter: Do you mean those agreements?

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Yes.

Mr. Christopher Winter: Yes, we should be able to provide them to you.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I have a question for Mr. Eckert.

You have letters of good standing. Who writes those letters and who approves them? How do they come about? I'm assuming that you have had no complaints. Have you had any complaints?

Mr. Mark Eckert: A good standing letter has a process, and it is issued for a team trying to travel abroad. In Canada, it means the province first reviews the team, the coaches, the staff and every player. Then they submit it to Volleyball Canada. We are the secondary review. We ultimately have to be the signatory because it involves international travel.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Have you had any complaints? Have there been any complaints with your athletes since 2015? If so, do you know the number? Have there been any financial awards granted?

Mr. Mark Eckert: No, there has never been a financial piece done, going back to 2015. We have our list, and 19 cases have occurred. These are not all maltreatment or sexual cases. There are five of those on record.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Can we get a list of them?

Mr. Mark Eckert: Absolutely. They can be shared.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: The last question I have is for Debra.

Who funds the Sport Information Resource Centre?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: We receive funding and generate our revenue a lot of different ways. We do grants with researchers and literature reviews. We offer services—

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Does any of the money you receive come from the federal government?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: Yes, we get some. We are doing something with Health Canada right now on an air quality health index. We do stuff with Sport Canada—

Mrs. Anna Roberts: How much would you say you get?

The Chair: We have to go to our next round.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Oh, I'm sorry.

The Chair: It's okay.

I'm going to pass the floor over to Sonia.

Sonia, you have four minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their insightful testimony.

My first question goes to Mr. Winter.

Can you expand on how the board and the Athletics Canada commissioner's office operate independently and impartially?

Mr. Christopher Winter: They're given their terms of reference, which is an agreement document published for public consumption. It sets out how they're to manage any complaints in those six different areas. They're given a great deal of discretion in how they conduct and appeal a complaints review. They work with the party by providing information to the complainants to ensure they're aware of their rights and what the process looks like. They'll work in different, alternative ways in coming to a resolution, and this obviously depends on the severity of the complaint. Obviously not all complaints they receive are the most egregious, with sexual abuse or maltreatment. There may be other issues and complaints brought forward for them to deal with.

It's done, again, in an independent manner. They can obviously ask questions of Athletics Canada if any sort of testimony needs to be provided on the part of the NSO, but they are able to manage it in a completely independent process. Those files are not shared with Athletics Canada. We're not able to embed ourselves in that process. In many cases, we are not aware a complaint has been received or an investigation is ongoing until the report is made at the end.

We feel that is the way the process should operate so that there's no way for the staff and Athletics Canada to meddle with the process. We want it to be as independent as possible so that athletes feel they're getting a fair shake at the process and don't risk retribution. Obviously we wouldn't want there to be retribution at all, but we also want to make sure athletes don't feel there's a chance of that.

• (1255)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Gassewitz.

I know you have done a lot of consultation with athletes and coaches. What are you hearing when it comes to promoting and improving mandatory training and education?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: That's a great question.

We're hearing that loud and clear across the country. When it came to the survey, having education and training ended up being the biggest message, whether it was coming from our athletes or coaches. Our officials, in particular, came forward in this area of abuse. That was huge.

Education and training are priorities for getting the message out at all levels to all participants loud and clear. Values and ethics, which are under the category of safe sport training, ranked number one among our community sports.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: We know OSIC has only existed since June. In your view, what does the future look like?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: I think it shows we're making progress. When we look at 2019, we see it wasn't really on the radar. Now we have it and everybody has mandatory programs. Now we have an independent mechanism. This is such an important topic, and the fact that we're moving and making progress is, I think, setting the course for Canada to be a leader in making sport safe for everybody. I think it's a good step.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: To follow up, do you think an annual report on the well-being of athletes, outside of performance metrics, should be necessary?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: Do you mean an annual report on the athlete experience?

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Yes.

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: Honestly, I think this goes to the idea of having an athlete experience or a participant experience in sport regardless of who you are—athletes, coaches or anybody else involved. I would love to see each year that people are having a positive experience, because that was the message: Let's make it positive.

The Chair: That's fantastic.

We'll now move to Jean-Denis for two minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Winter, many, if not all, athletes are calling for a judicial inquiry or an independent commission to get to the bottom of all the allegations and all the things that are happening in sports.

Can you confirm to us, here today, on camera, that you and your organization support this request from the athletes?

[English]

Mr. Christopher Winter: The simple answer is yes. We obviously want to know a bit more about what that looks like to fully understand it, but if the athletes feel unanimously that this will lead to a better experience for them in sport and a more positive and safe sporting environment, then absolutely we would be on board to help support that.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Thank you, Mr. Winter.

In particular, you mentioned earlier that you have a whistleblower procedure in place. And you are in favour of an independent inquiry. Now, all of this shows that there is a major problem upstream with the culture in sports and in your sport.

I would like you to tell us about the main steps taken by your organization recently to bring about a real change in sports culture. Could you give me some examples of things that have been done?

[English]

Mr. Christopher Winter: As I mentioned in my opening statement, we're working with both volleyball and swimming to develop an education platform that looks to address a more holistic athlete experience. There will be education components around maltreatment specifically, but we're also looking at other components: mental wellness, nutrition, injury prevention and concussion prevention. That's the place we want to go with this, because we know that while the maltreatment piece is certainly the most egregious and the most concerning, those other areas are equally important for ensuring athletes have a positive experience in sports. Unfortunately that platform just doesn't exist right now.

We are using education and training programs provided through both the CAC—the Coaching Association of Canada—and the Respect Group. We have all of our coaches, staff, and board and committee members take that training, but we feel the athletes obviously need to have the training as well. It's hugely important. It's unfortunate that those training and education modules currently don't exist.

By working with those two other NSOs and with the support of the CAC, we're endeavouring to do this, and that process has been going on for well over a year now.

• (1300)

The Chair: That's perfect.

We'll now move back over to Leah Gazan.

Leah, you have two minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I want to follow up with Ms. Gassewitz.

You indicated that you don't provide any funding, but I'm looking at your website and I see this, from July 9, 2021: "SIRC Awards Community Activation Grants to Champion Safety in Sport". It says, "The Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC) is pleased to continue making sport safer in Canada.... Through SIRC's Community Activation Grants program, 25 organizations have received grants to focus on education and awareness of...sport in their communities". Then it goes on to say this is supported by the government.

You have, in fact, provided financial supports, supported by the federal government, so I'm going to go back to my question. Have you ever funded an organization that's been implicated in child abuse, and if so, what has been your immediate response?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: On the framing of the community activation grants, which was a pilot where we were working towards education—

Ms. Leah Gazan: I would like that question answered, because you had the discretion to choose who got the funding. You were involved. Did you fund anybody who had allegations of child abuse, and if so, what happened to the grants?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: We have a process we go through—in this case it was for the pilot—when looking at all the different communities across the country to see what we can share—

Ms. Leah Gazan: So you didn't fund any organizations that were implicated in any sort of child abuse.

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: For organizations that to our knowledge are in the matrix we are looking at, it is a no. We are doing our best to increase awareness and try to help with education. I think that's the big focus—

Ms. Leah Gazan: It seems like there are a lot of conflicts here. I'm sorry that I have to be so pushy, but I was told one thing and then I have to research and find out other information. There seems to be a level of distrust in this field. I hope I can get some clarification. Maybe you can submit a written brief about it.

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: I'm happy to follow up with you in any way if there's something I don't understand.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

The Chair: That's fantastic.

I'm just going to use the privilege of the chair to ask one question specifically of you, Debra.

When I look at the funding model for your organization, I see that approximately 92% of funding is from the Government of Canada. Is that correct?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: This last year, given COVID.... I'm just going to speak to the numerous different pieces. It's not 92%.

The Chair: Your 2021 balance sheet shows that 92% of funding was from the federal government, so could you send in your documents for 2022? I would ask that you table those so we can see the funding from the Government of Canada to your organization. I'd greatly appreciate it. Thank you so much.

On behalf of all committee members, I'd like to thank all of the witnesses for today's testimony. I appreciate all of you for coming in.

To all members, best wishes and have a healthy and happy holiday season. This is our last FEWO meeting until January 2023.

To everybody, have a safe and happy holidays. Thanks very much.

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