

Prepared Statement by Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa  
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee  
Hearing on Protecting Young Athletes from Sexual Abuse  
March 28, 2017

Good morning.

The Judiciary Committee is no stranger to contentious debate. But when it comes to championing the rights of those who've been victimized, this Committee has a clear bipartisan history. We're here today to build upon that bipartisan tradition and learn what more can be done to keep our nation's children and young athletes safe from sexual predators.

Protecting children from abusers has been a top priority for me over the years. Over thirty years ago, I sponsored the *Child Abuse Victims' Rights Act*. This measure enhances civil and criminal penalties against those who sexually exploit children. A version of this measure was enacted and continues to this day to provide a mechanism by which victims can seek justice in our civil justice system. And just last year, I worked with my colleagues to pass another important measure, known as the "Survivors' Bill of Rights." It empowers survivors of sexual assault in the criminal justice system.

Sadly, we know that sexual abuse of children can occur in any setting. But what's especially disturbing is when that abuse occurs by someone in a position of trust, in what should be a safe environment, such as youth athletics programs.

Recent headlines have focused our attention on troubling allegations of child sexual abuse in gymnastics programs around the country. USA Gymnastics, the national sports organization that oversees gymnastics in the United States, was the focus of an investigation last year by the *Indianapolis Star*. The newspaper detailed hundreds of sexual abuse allegations from gymnasts across the country over a period of two decades. Coaches, instructors, and even the national gymnastics team's doctor have been accused of abusing child athletes.

Unfortunately this isn't the only national sports organization that's made headlines for alleged sexual abuse by coaches and instructors in recent years. We all remember that USA Swimming several years ago imposed lifetime bans on dozens of swim coaches for abusing teenagers.

The outcry from the latest victims led us to convene today's hearing and explore whether we're doing enough to ensure children's safety in athletic organizations.

For example, some have argued that USA Gymnastics didn't alert the authorities to suspected sexual abuse until and unless a formal, written complaint was submitted by a victim or their family. If true, such a policy might have allowed predators to victimize children long after gymnastics officials had reason to suspect sexual abuse. Other media accounts suggest that coaches weren't banned from the sport until years after they were convicted of crimes against children.

Sexual abuse is a heinous crime and should be treated as such. So I hope that our witnesses can help us understand why allegations of sexual abuse so often remain hidden, instead of being immediately reported to law enforcement. The average perpetrator strikes multiple times before being caught, which is why it's so important that these crimes be promptly reported and investigated.

USA Gymnastics has chosen not to appear today before the Judiciary Committee to answer any of my or my colleagues' questions. But we are fortunate to have with us today several individuals who have been through the unimaginable. We're going to hear firsthand about their experiences.

We're also going to hear from the United States Olympic Committee, the organization that certifies 47 national sports organizations that work with youth. We'll hear how the U.S. Olympic Committee is working to ensure young athletes' safety. And we'll hear from a prosecutor with years of experience prosecuting sex crimes.

I thank each of our witnesses for being here today and for sharing their stories and expertise.

Finally, I also want to extend my thanks to Ranking Member Feinstein, for taking the lead in developing an important bill that is a direct response to these issues. I've joined her as an original cosponsor of this legislation, which would promote more reporting and give survivors tools to hold perpetrators accountable. I know she will speak more about the bill, but I'm proud to be a co-sponsor.

So now I'll turn to Ranking Member Feinstein for her opening statement.