

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 1, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Ju'Riese Colón
U.S. Center for SafeSport
Denver, Co 80246

Dear Ms. Colón:

I write regarding reports that the U.S. Center for SafeSport (“SafeSport” or “the Center”) has been slow to investigate allegations of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, allowing child athletes to remain in the care of their alleged abusers.¹ These reports include allegations that a child was dragged by her neck, another was slapped in her face, and a third was kicked at a meet while injured.² These alarming reports—and others like them—remain unresolved, with SafeSport placing few to no protective measures on alleged abusers while investigations languish.³

SafeSport has tools to impose precautionary protective measures during pending investigations.⁴ Those restrictions range from alternating training schedules to suspending participation in activities, and can be “modified or removed” as the investigation progresses.⁵ However, from July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020, SafeSport imposed protective measures in just 6% of cases created during that period.⁶ That percentage appears to have decreased, with SafeSport reporting placement of protective measures in a mere 5% of cases in 2023.⁷ Without basic protections in place, the *Washington Post* reports, many accused coaches remain active to this day without restraints.⁸

¹ Molly Hensley-Clancy, *Accused Of Abuse And Back In The Gym*, The Washington Post (July 23, 2024), [Long after Nassar scandal, gymnastics coaches accused of abuse remain - The Washington Post](#).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ U.S. Center For Safe Sport, Centralized Disciplinary Database Overview & Definitions (last accessed July 30, 2024), [CDD-Link-1-overview-and-definitions-v2.pdf \(uscenterforsafesport.org\)](#)

⁵ SafeSport Code For the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement, Section XII (A)(3) (effective July 1, 2024), available at [2024 SafeSport Code - Second Edition \(uscenterforsafesport.org\)](#) [hereinafter “SafeSport Code”].

⁶ U.S. GOV’T ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, GAO-21-128R, *Amateur Athletes: The US Center for SafeSport’s Response and Resolution Process for Reporting Abuse*, 11 (Dec. 18, 2020).

⁷ U.S. Center for SafeSport, *Grassroots to Gold: Athlete Safety At Every Level 2023 Annual Report*, 13 (Temporary Suspensions 3%; Temporary Restriction(s) 2%); *See also*, U.S. Center For Safe Sport, Centralized Disciplinary Database Overview & Definitions, at 2-3 (listing temporary suspensions as a form of temporary restriction).

⁸ Molly Hensley-Clancy, *Accused Of Abuse And Back In The Gym*, The Washington Post (July 23, 2024), [Long after Nassar scandal, gymnastics coaches accused of abuse remain - The Washington Post](#).

It appears SafeSport exacerbated the problem by promulgating a misunderstanding that national governing bodies “either need not (or cannot) act once SafeSport has exercised exclusive jurisdiction.”⁹ This purportedly discouraged others from imposing their own sanctions and protective measures.¹⁰ Since then, and in response to the U.S. Soccer Federation’s (USFF) independent investigation of sexual misconduct, SafeSport representatives clarified to USFF that governing bodies can impose their own protective measures during pending SafeSport investigations.¹¹ However, it is unclear what, if anything, SafeSport has done to correct this misunderstanding with other governing bodies.

Congress established SafeSport in 2017 with the mission of protecting athletes from abuse. Yet long after SafeSport’s formation, several habitual abusers remain in positions of trust, despite public scrutiny spotlighting their misconduct. Rory Dames is one of those alleged abusers. A 2022 USFF commissioned investigative report mentions Dames nearly 400 times.¹² At the time of the report, Dames was an owner of an elite youth soccer club.¹³ He reportedly asked his young players for massages, rubbed one girl’s inner thigh, and made another sit in his lap.¹⁴ A 1998 Arlington Heights Police Department report detailed Dames’ sexual abuse and included that Dames had “punched a male player in the stomach at a practice session.”¹⁵ After a social worker inexplicably closed the case, Dames continued to use his position of power to begin sexual relationships with his teenage players after they reached the legal age of consent but while they were still under his authority.¹⁶

In 2019, SafeSport opened an investigation into Dames based on reports of Dames’ romantic relationship with a former player.¹⁷ Within a month, SafeSport determined “there [was] insufficient evidence to proceed with a formal investigation at th[at] time.”¹⁸ After a wave of reporting from the *Atlantic* and the *Washington Post* publicized Dames’ abuse, the USFF notified SafeSport of additional misconduct by Dames and suspended his coaching license pending resolution of the investigation.¹⁹ Still, SafeSport watered down the temporary suspension to allow Dames to coach under supervision and other constraints.²⁰ To this day, the SafeSport

⁹ Report of the Independent Investigation to the U.S. Soccer Federation Concerning Allegations of Abusive Behavior and Sexual Misconduct in Women’s Professional Soccer, at 167 (Oct. 3, 2022), [King & Spalding - Full Report to USSF \(kslaw.com\)](#)

¹⁰ Report of the Independent Investigation to the U.S. Soccer Federation Concerning Allegations of Abusive Behavior and Sexual Misconduct in Women’s Professional Soccer, at 167 (Oct. 3, 2022), [King & Spalding - Full Report to USSF \(kslaw.com\)](#) [Hereinafter, “Yates Rpt.”]

¹¹ *Id.* at 168.

¹² Yates Rpt. at 167; Andrew Eastmond, *Don’t Let Youth Soccer Club Owner Rory Dames Off the Hook*, Chicago Tribune (July 7, 2023), [Andrew Eastmond: Don't let youth soccer club owner Rory Dames off the hook \(chicagotribune.com\)](#).

¹³ Yates Rpt. at 89.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 92, 98.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 99.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 100.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 120.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.* at 125-26

²⁰ *Id.*

Centralized Disciplinary Database list Dames as subject to only “temporary restrictions,” including coaching or training restrictions, communication limitations, and no contact directives.²¹

The Dames investigation appears to have dragged on for nearly two years, but is far from the longest pending SafeSport investigation. For example, just last month SafeSport declared Barry Hyder permanently ineligible *four years after* receiving reports of his sexual misconduct involving a minor.²² In fact, SafeSport reportedly identified more than 120 cases open longer than two years.²³

SafeSport is aware that alleged abusers continue to have unfettered access to child and adult athletes as cases toil through its administrative processes. In 2021, I asked survivors to share their thoughts on SafeSport during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing examining the failures that enabled child predator Larry Nassar. Aly Raisman responded, “I don’t like SafeSport. I hear from many survivors that they report their abuse and it’s like playing hot potato where someone else kicks it over to someone else and they don’t hear back for a really long time.”²⁴ Raisman concluded, “[SafeSport’s] priority doesn’t seem to be [the] safety and well-being of athletes.” This is an affront to justice and demands immediate correction.

Please answer the following questions by September 2, 2024.

1. When imposing protective measures, the SafeSport Policy Guideline directs employees to evaluate (i) the seriousness of the allegations and circumstances of the case; (ii) the Respondent’s ongoing or potential risk to the well-being or safety of others; and (iii) whether the allegations are sufficiently serious.²⁵ What are the metrics for determining each of these three factors?
2. Since June 30, 2020, how many times has SafeSport imposed protective measures while conducting ongoing investigations? Please provide a breakdown of which measures SafeSport imposed.
3. Please explain why SafeSport appears to have decreased its use of protective measures and detail any plans SafeSport has to increase the number of cases in which it places protective measures.

²¹ U.S. Center For Safe Sport Centralized Disciplinary Database (last accessed Aug. 1, 2024), available at <https://uscenterforsafesport.org/response-and-resolution/centralized-disciplinary-database/>

²² Dan Solomon and Jessica Luther, *Unsafe Sport*, Texas Monthly (Apr. 2022), <https://www.texasmonthly.com/arts-entertainment/texas-gymnastics-abuse-safesport/>.

²³ Molly Hensley-Clancy, *Accused Of Abuse And Back In The Gym*, The Washington Post (July 23, 2024), [Long after Nassar scandal, gymnastics coaches accused of abuse remain - The Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2024/07/23/long-after-nassar-scandal-gymnastics-coaches-accused-of-abuse-remain-the-washington-post/).

²⁴ Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing Titled “Dereliction of Duty: Examining the Inspector General’s Report on the FBI’s Handling of the Larry Nassar Investigation”, 117th Cong. (2021) (testimony of Aly Raisman)

²⁵ SafeSport Code § XII (A)(2).

4. How does SafeSport accurately and compressively communicate protective measures and sanctions imposed on a respondent to the relevant organizations?
5. What efforts has SafeSport made to educate national governing bodies that they can impose protective measures while SafeSport conducts its investigation?
6. SafeSport administratively closed 6,614 cases and declined jurisdiction in 5,352 cases in 2023.²⁶ Please provide any records SafeSport creates tracking case closures and jurisdictional declinations that explain the reason for SafeSport's action.
7. How long have the 120 cases SafeSport identified as open longer for than two years been pending investigation?
8. Since 2020, how often has SafeSport relaxed sanctions or protection measures placed by national governing bodies on Respondents to SafeSport investigations? In each case, what was the justification for relaxing these restrictions?
9. Given the apparent fact that young athletes remain in potential danger because of your decisions, why should you remain in your position at SafeSport?

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley

²⁶ U.S. Center for SafeSport, *Grassroots to Gold: Athlete Safety At Every Level 2023 Annual Report*, 14.