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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1100)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 74 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[English]

Today's meeting is being run under a hybrid format, in keeping with the order of the House of Commons that was adopted on June 23, 2022.

I also want to give you a couple of housekeeping notes. Again, I want to welcome everybody and say that, while public health authorities and the Board of Internal Economy no longer require that you wear a mask when you are in the room, masks and respirators are still excellent tools to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases and their use is encouraged.

I want to take this opportunity to tell all participants that they are not allowed to take screenshots or photos of their screens during this meeting. The proceedings will be made available on the public website, so you can get anything you want there.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 20, 2022, this committee is meeting to continue its study on safe sport in Canada.

I have just a couple of things to say. For those of you appearing virtually, at the bottom of your screen there's a little round globe. When you press it, it will give you English or French, or the original, as you need. Also, remember to mute yourself when you're not speaking. All questions and comments should be addressed through the chair, so please don't speak unless I call your name. Thank you very much.

We will begin.

Today, we again have our study of safe sport in Canada. Our witnesses are Kate Bahen, managing director, Charity Intelligence Canada; from the Coaching Association of Canada, Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière, CEO, who is in the room; and, from the Sport Information Resource Centre, Debra Gassewitz, president and chief executive officer.

I want to welcome you and thank you for taking the time to come and bear witness to us about some of the questions you're going to get.

I shall begin. Every person appearing here as part of a group or as an individual has five minutes to speak. I will give you a 30-second shout-out, and I mean shout-out. I'll say "30 seconds", so ignore me and just remember that it means you have only 30 seconds left and then I'll have to cut you off.

Thank you very much.

I will begin with Ms. Bahen for five minutes, please.

Ms. Kate Bahen (Managing Director, Charity Intelligence Canada): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I wanted to quickly say "thank you so much" to the committee for its conduct. We've all watched, and it has been so refreshing to see a really thorough investigation of what happened at Hockey Canada.

My name is Kate Bahen. I'm the managing director at Charity Intelligence. Charity Intelligence researches Canadian charities, and we post research reports on our website so that Canadians can be informed about their giving.

I have not analyzed, reviewed or rated Hockey Canada. My work on this file was purely to help journalists walk through and understand the audited financial statements. I've been invited to report to you on the financial transparency of Canada's sports organizations—the RCAAAs—and charities.

The RCAAAs are amateur athletic associations. They're a small subset of Canada's registered charities. They can issue donation receipts, yet this small group of 138 amateur athletic charities is not required to complete an annual return, called the T3010. Every other Canadian charity must complete this annual return. The T3010 discloses basic information about a charity, including staff, compensation, programs and finances. This loophole must be closed. RCAAAs must file an annual T3010, just like every other registered charity in Canada.

There is another area where financial transparency can be improved. Last May, when the news about the Hockey Canada legal settlement broke, Canadians had many questions. We were unable to answer these questions. Hockey Canada was not financially transparent. Its books were closed and its finances were not publicly available.

The information is available if one goes to the bother, cost and delay of filing an access to information request. Mark Blumberg filed this request, but the pages he received were incomplete. It took three months—until August 2022—for us to receive Hockey Canada's complete audited financial statements. Hockey Canada became financially transparent in December 2022, when it posted the PDFs of its audited financial statements.

The lack of financial transparency among Canadian charities is far more common than Canadians expect. In 2007, when we asked charities for audited financial statements, 28% refused. In 2022, 13% refused. This lack of financial transparency is out of step with the public's expectations, as 92% of Canadians say that charities should be financially transparent. Whether it's 2007 or 2023, Canadians are always shocked to learn that charities are not required to be financially transparent.

Should Canadian charities have the right to refuse to be financially transparent? This option is only available in Canada. In the U.S., the U.K. and Australia, financial transparency is regulated. In those countries, the audited financial statements are posted on the charity regulator's website and are easily available with just a click. It's time Canada got in step and did the same.

While aligned with what Canadians want, there could be strong opposition from the minority of charities that fiercely keep their books closed. These charities include some of Canada's largest charities, which receive hundreds of millions of dollars in annual donations. We track \$750 million in annual donations going to what we call these "dark pool" or "black hole" charities.

Thomas Cromwell found this attitude at Hockey Canada. I quote from his report, in which he said:

Hockey Canada expressed that some other changes were just not well suited for their organization, such as making the financial statements...available to the public. Although Hockey Canada has achieved considerable financial success over the years, Hockey Canada is concerned that being seen as an organization with "deep pockets" could create some negative implications.

For example, [financial transparency] could have an effect on their bargaining power with respect to the settlement of lawsuits, and this could also influence the amount of money that sponsors would be willing to offer in the future. This is not to mention the fact that the media could use [the] information to depict a negative image of the organization.

• (1105)

Hockey Canada's attitude is common among the non-transparent minority of charities. These charities see their activities as nobody else's business.

I ask for your committee, for your leadership, to make Canadian charities financially transparent.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Bahen.

Now I will go to the Coaching Association of Canada and Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière.

Ms. Lafrenière, you have five minutes, please. Thank you.

• (1110)

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière (Chief Executive Officer, Coaching Association of Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I too would like to acknowledge the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe peoples on which we find ourselves.

[*Translation*]

I want to acknowledge the courage of the victims and survivors who have broken the silence.

[*English*]

The Coaching Association of Canada was called as a witness on December 1, 2022, to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. CAC's witness statement and submitted brief are available. Our position remains that an inquiry is needed. As Minister St-Onge confirmed, it is a matter of when and how.

An inquiry will only be successful if it is built on the collaboration of all partners in the sport system as well as those who contribute and partner in sport. An example is our work with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection. They guide us with their expertise. We need insight and understanding from each jurisdiction—the provinces, the territories, the federal government, the national sport federations, and the provincial and territorial sport federations. How can we better address the governance issues across the system? How can we better identify leading practices and fast-track improvement across the country?

Permit me to share the interdependence of CAC in coach training education across the country.

[*Translation*]

The mandate of the Coaching Association of Canada is to provide an ethical framework for the development of coaches and sport practitioners and to implement and promote a developmental program in association with all levels of government—federal, provincial and territorial governments—national, provincial and territorial sport organizations, and clubs. This covers the entire sport system.

[*English*]

Sport and recreation are critical to Canada's post-COVID recovery. The research is clear. Evidence has shown that between 40% and 48% of children and adolescents experienced mental health issues during the pandemic. Those who did not have access to sport and recreation were worse. We are really trying to urgently address this issue with the support of the Public Health Agency of Canada by improving mental health literacy in our coaches, our participants and our athletes.

The good news is that sport is on the rise. The most recent Canadian Tire “Jumpstart State of Sport Report” points out that while 70% of parents agree that organized sports offer great experiences for their children, 44% say they cannot afford registration. Additionally, 81% of sport organizations surveyed said that the cost to run youth programming has risen.

The message is simple: Sport is important, but everybody is struggling under the weight of costs. This exposes a threat to safe sport as well-intentioned individuals and organizations cut corners to offer sport. The experiences and dynamics in grassroots sport must be included as part of the inquiry so that we can acknowledge and proactively address the challenges facing our athletes as they progress through their journey—and our coaches as well.

Finally, our priority at CAC is to continue to focus on prevention in partnership with Sport Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada and Status of Women Canada and to find ways to address safe sport by currently working to standardize screening processes and enhance training for coaches in an athlete-centred, holistic development approach.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Lafrenière.

Now I go to our last witness, which is the Sport Information Resource Centre and Ms. Gassewitz.

You have five minutes, please.

Ms. Debra Gassewitz (President and Chief Executive Officer, Sport Information Resource Centre): Thank you, Madam Chair and the heritage standing committee on safe sport, for inviting me to speak today on behalf of the Sport Information Resource Centre, also referred to as SIRC.

To the survivors in sport who have come forward and shared their experiences and for 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 and today as someone working in sport, I firmly believe that 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 and most-trusted partner in advancing sport through knowledge and evidence. Our role is to help answer questions, facilitate conversations and share knowledge with the sport sector. We're not an advocacy group. We are a resource centre known for our neutrality and for our desire to help find credible information and to listen and learn.

For example, 10 years ago, concussions were not well known in the public conversation. Athletes, coaches, officials, parents and sport media all seemed to embrace the “tough it out and shake it off” mentality. In 2016, the government, led by Governor General David Johnston, decided that “We Can Do Better”. The FPT ministers made it a priority to increase concussion awareness, learn how to manage and prevent concussions in sport, and collect the data to continue learning. Today, all national sport organizations have mandatory concussion policies. The provinces have implemented

concussion protocols. Ontario has Rowan's Law Day, and the FPT ministers endorsed the fourth week of September to be Concussion Awareness Week every year.

Maltreatment in sport is a serious problem, as evidenced by the revelations of horrendous harms experienced by athletes. We recognize that safe sport is a priority for Canadians, as it was highlighted in 14 of the 24 Canadian sport policy consultations last year. However, we are also witnessing behaviour change as it relates to safe sport. From the Red Deer declaration endorsed by the FPT ministers in 2019 to the creation and mandatory adoption of the UCCMS and OSIC by national sport organizations, change is happening.

In an effort to be proactive, NSOs, PSOs and universities are now creating dedicated staffing positions to help focus on safe sport. SIRC hosts Canada's national sport job board, and this past year we've noticed an emergence of postings for sport safety coordinators, sport safety officers, safe sport managers and directors of safe sport, as well as managers of HR and equity, diversity and inclusion, and recently one for an EDI and anti-racism coordinator.

We have observed an increase in education and awareness surrounding safe sport: the CAC and Respect in Sport online modules, the sport research conference with an inclusion and diversity panel, the Ontario Soccer Summit with a safe sport panel, SIRCuit articles highlighting recent research. Sports are collaborating and offering training in ways that are relevant to their members, their staff and their boards.

We also are seeing an increase in safe sport and safeguarding-related research. The findings of our recent literature review of over 30 studies echoes what we heard from the more than 5,000 Canadians who participated in the Canadian sport policy renewal process in 2022. Programming needs to be more than developmentally and technically sound. It needs to promote equity, diversity and inclusion. Calls for mandatory safe sport, anti-racism and cultural awareness training for everyone in sport—participants, parents, coaches, officials, administrators and leaders—were loud and clear.

While safe sport environments are necessary for everyone in sport, athletes and officials were identified as the people most often experiencing abuse and harassment. In particular, the issue of abuse of officials is under-recognized and contributes to a larger problem of official availability, and we can't run sports without officials. As mentioned in a campaign currently run by several PSOs in Manitoba and Ontario, "No Ref, No Game".

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 and encourage sustainable programming that promotes safe sport at all levels of sport.

Thank you for listening. We want to help.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Gassewitz.

Now I'm going to go to the part of the meeting that is a question-and-answer period. The first round is going to be six minutes. Six minutes means questions and answers, so please, everyone, try to be as concise as you can.

We will begin with the Conservatives.

Mrs. Thomas, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): That's perfect. Thank you.

To all the witnesses, I want to thank you for taking the time to be with us here today.

My first question is for Ms. Gassewitz.

Ms. Gassewitz, I'm curious about whether you've ever received government funding.

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: Yes, we do.

• (1120)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: What does that look like?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: We get funding from Sport Canada for a lot of programs. We also recently received funding from Health Canada on the air quality health index. There was some provincial funding helping us make job postings more accessible.

It's different types of government funding.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Ms. Gassewitz, what is the funding that comes from Sport Canada used for?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: We use it for several different projects.

Some is for that core funding for communications, allowing the sport sector across the board to share their announcements, what's going on and what jobs are available. There's that central vehicle. It's also used to share educational programs, resources and new learnings. There's a quarterly newsletter that shares a lot of research that is synthesized and shared out with the sector. There's daily news that goes out. There's social media that goes out.

We also have funding for dedicated programs, such as for concussion. We obviously try to encourage host venues that bring peo-

ple from across the country together digitally, so that all 13 provinces and territories can hear about it. We also have research conferences and different projects where we're trying to get help to get the message across.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I have the same question for you, Ms. Lafrenière.

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: Yes, we receive government funding from Sport Canada.

We, as an organization, are mandated by the federal-provincial-territorial governments. The ministers responsible for sport endorse our mandate in coaching and education to train coaches from communities to high performance across 66 sports in every province and territory. Annually, we receive \$4 million in base funding from Sport Canada. We use that for coach education and training, and for building curriculum in our safe sport programs across the board.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: What are the accountability mechanisms put in place, in terms of how that funding is used?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: The accountability mechanism is an annual report to the Government of Canada on our performance. We publish an annual report posting where we've had our successes and failures. We report to our board of directors as well.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Also to you, Ms. Gassewitz, what are the accountability mechanisms put in place between you and Sport Canada?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: Absolutely. We have to provide reports regularly on every one of the different programs. There's the regular reporting that goes in. We have our annual report. When we're doing the special projects, we're accounting and working with Sport Canada throughout the process, as well, to make sure it is completely transparent.

There are several different ways of making sure there's continued accountability.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I'm going to give the mike over to Mr. Kevin Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you.

I'll continue with Ms. Lafrenière.

Your NCCP training and workshops... I've taken one. They're good. The background checks by your organization in Canada, that is the biggest thing.

Can you talk about the background checks? We've seen a number of coaches, over the years, slip through. Perhaps talk about the background checks, as we're all looking for volunteers to become coaches.

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: It's not uniform across the country, which is a challenge. In different jurisdictions, there are costs associated with it, which is why I brought that point forward earlier about the costs of running safe sport and quality sport delivery.

We support the Canadian Olympic Committee, the Canadian Paralympic Committee and Commonwealth Games Canada in doing the screening of coaches who go to the Olympic, Paralympic, Pan Am and Commonwealth games.

That partnership exists, but currently national sport federations adopt their own approaches to screening coaches, which is one element of prevention that sets the appropriate stage for safety.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: That has to change in this country. How do we change it?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: We're currently trying to work with Sport Canada to access funding, so we can build a model for screening across national sport federations. We hope, with our partnership with the provincial and territorial governments—because of our mandate—that we're able to support uniform implementation of screening across the country that is understood at the door of the clubhouse.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: That's the problem in this country. You have provincial bodies and then you have the lower end of it, let's say the starting sports that really don't adhere to many of the provincial programs because they're just starting out, like soccer, gymnastics and others.

Comment on that.

• (1125)

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: It's a challenge. When you look at the sports sector in general and the rotation of staff through sport, in some instances it is an entry-level position. It's not uniform, so we need to address that and codify and document exactly the process to ensure that it's adhered to.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Will OSIC help or not?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: OSIC can contribute to policies. These are early stages.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I'll go to the Liberals and Tim Louis for six minutes, please.

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all of the witnesses for being here for this important study as we move forward.

Perhaps I will start online with Ms. Gassewitz.

What are the challenges of having national sports organizations, provincial sports organizations and territorial sports organizations setting those standards for safe sport?

We've heard in previous testimony that there are concerns about minimum standards. As long as an organization has to tick a box,

that's good enough. Can you start with the baseline standards you'd like to see for sports organizations provincially, nationally and territorially, and expand on what you'd like to see?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: You identified one of those big challenges. In a country as large as ours with as many sports as we have at the national, the provincial, the territorial and the community levels, there are a lot of challenges. Alignment is one of those, where it's trying to get.... Once you have a policy consistently making it through the system and across the country to the different sports, I think that becomes one of those biggest pieces.

When it comes to communication, people and organizations receive information differently, and there are different players. You need to have some of those consistent baselines, which is what you referred to.

Having a consistent policy is that first step. At least everyone has the rules and the policies that go in place. Those basic rules and those policies should be across the board. From there, it goes to the education. It's no good having a policy that just sits on a shelf. It needs to be shared with all the members, all the people within any of the organizations and across all of them. Then it needs to be evaluated and continued—that reinforcement.

If you're looking at those different stages, you have to have that baseline that we all have as a minimum standard. Then we need to really focus on communication, and it needs to be relevant to that sport and that region, whether it's our territories or B.C. or anywhere. For athletes, for parents and for board members, there are different types of communication. Communication is critical to keeping that messaging consistent so that it's repeated over and over again. Hearing it once is not enough. It has to come different ways so it makes sense. Then it has to be evaluated. Is it working? This is a whole dynamic process. What's working and what's not? Take the lesson and then reapply it. I think those are key.

Mr. Tim Louis: I think that was very thorough: a consistent policy, education, evaluation and then communication.

All of that would require data monitoring, so how can we make sure that we have the data that's out there? How can we make sure that we get that data and allow those steps to happen?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: You're right. That is such a critical opportunity. I would equally refer to it as we are getting a lot of data, but that is an opportunity going forward to make sure that we have consistent data collection working with our researchers and being mindful—because it's very time consuming to try to capture it—of how to collect it. You can set a consistent way of data collection, making sure that it's open for people to be able to study, that people can report back and that the lessons can be shared. I think working with our research community, working with all the sports and having consistency in how to collect, being mindful of timing, are just so important, especially if we're going 10 years forward, as we're looking to. We're trying to learn and evaluate, but to make it easy so that we can capture the data and we can learn from it.

Mr. Tim Louis: Thank you.

I'll address Ms. Lafrenière.

I appreciate you being here. In my riding of Kitchener—Conestoga, we have the Wolverines, which is the women's and girls' hockey association U15 B team. It is led by all-women coaching. One of the Wolverine's coaches said she had a female coach in her last years in minor hockey and that gave her the confidence that she could be a coach herself. Now she's sharing her talents, her values, everything she's learned and her experience by coaching these young women.

Players describe the experience as comfortable and fun. In a study as serious as this is, hearing those words is inspiring. They see the women coaches leading. I know that's making a positive difference, probably in their sports and in their lives as well. It's that “if you can see it, you can be it” mentality.

As far as training, certification and leadership groups, what exists and what can we do to expand on stories like this about diversity and having more women as coaches?

● (1130)

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, thank you for sharing that story. We need that storytelling to happen across the country to get more women and girls engaged in leadership. We know that in the national coaching certification program, it hovers around 65:35, males versus females accessing the training and intervention. We also know from data at the Olympics and Paralympics how dramatically reduced it is for women in coaching positions. We try earnestly to work in these areas. Diversity in coaching is so important, and it's the broad spectrum of diversity.

We have a partnership with the Black Canadian Coaches Association to offer apprenticeship programs. We have a partnership with the Aboriginal Sport Circle, where we support its apprenticeship programs at Canada Games. We have a women's Canada Games apprenticeship program, where we benefit from great success at those events.

It really is about the priority of the system to tell stories and to offer positive opportunities for safe sport. Diversity is the key to safe sport.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lafrenière.

Tim, your time is up.

I now go to the Bloc Québécois. I hope it's Mr. Lemire.

Is it Sébastien?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Yes, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank all the witnesses for their testimony.

Ms. Bahen, do you feel that Hockey Canada has changed its culture in terms of transparency and accountability?

[*English*]

Ms. Kate Bahen: It changed in December 2022, when it posted its audited financial statements. After all the investigation and after all the pressure, that was not a willing decision. It took a new management team. That kind of attitude is pervasive at the minority of charities and sports organizations that see their finances as their own business—nobody else's business—and do not recognize themselves as being public charities.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: In the course of our work, we have put questions to representatives of Hockey Canada and the Canadian Hockey League, which represents three leagues, particularly to explain the relationship between the two organizations. We wanted to see the contracts, but we have only seen one, and I would like the clerk to follow up with those organizations so that we can see all their contracts.

We have had access to the minutes, but there was no mention of secret funds that may have been used to settle sports misconduct or sexual assault cases. The existence of such an agreement is not disclosed in the financial statements. In addition, neither the previous nor the current board of directors have been following up on that agreement.

There have been two junior championships since the scandal broke. There is nothing in the minutes about expenses and revenues or about profit sharing. I don't feel that the money that was provided by the federal government is being tracked. Until recently, documents were not being turned over to Canada's Business Registries.

In my opinion, not much has really changed. Yet the minister has decided to restore funding to Hockey Canada. In your opinion, is this a good decision and was it made at the right time?

• (1135)

[English]

Ms. Kate Bahen: Everything you say there, sir, is exactly correct. There is such a culture of not being transparent. All of these sports organizations that are large need to be financially transparent. All of their assets, all of their dealings and all of their related-party transactions need to be provided.

Just listening today to the work that's being done in safe sport, it's difficult to reconcile whatever the Sport Canada funding is for Hockey Canada with the immense needs of other organizations to do safe sport if this is a government priority. Hockey Canada doesn't need the money. It has \$98 million in the bank. As it said itself, it has "deep pockets". It has millions and millions of dollars, and other organizations across Canada need funding to do critically important work.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: All in all, the agreement was reached amicably between Minister St-Onge and Hockey Canada. The details are not really known. In particular, we're relying on a study by the law firm Henein Hutchison Robitaille that has not been made public, so we don't know what the recommendations are.

The Cromwell report has some pretty solid recommendations, which I applaud, but overall, I feel like only an independent public inquiry could really shed light on how this organization is run and whether there is a healthy and safe follow-up to the coaching of athletes. In addition, it is known that most of these athletes play on Canadian Hockey League teams that would not necessarily be required to abide by the agreements that Hockey Canada signs, including its membership in the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner.

Could you elaborate on that? Minister St-Onge says that Hockey Canada is not being given a blank cheque, but are we giving the minister a blank cheque if we don't respond to this news and trust her or Sport Canada or any of the organizations that report to it? Ultimately, this is still done in a vacuum rather than in a transparent and public way. What do you think?

[English]

Ms. Kate Bahen: I believe the Cromwell report was exceptional and extraordinary in the in-depth work of looking at the issues at Hockey Canada. The Cromwell report made 39 recommendations, and so far six of those have been acted on. The Cromwell report was the third governance review since 2016. He noted that there had been other reviews where the recommendations hadn't been adopted.

At some point, you can make recommendations, but if these aren't implemented, it seems a bit premature to go ahead and turn on the taps and turn on the funding, especially given Hockey Canada's prominence across Canada and how many children and youth are affected by its programs.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Bahen.

I think, Sébastien, you have finished your time. Actually, no, you started a little bit late, so I'll give you another five or 10 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

Sport development organizations are often not-for-profit organizations that enjoy this recognized status in amateur sport. However, we realize that, in many cases, a lot of people are making a profit.

Do you feel that the level of transparency is adequate? Is the legal status of these companies the correct one, particularly in the case of organizations like Hockey Canada or, in the circumstances, Canada Soccer?

[English]

Ms. Kate Bahen: The level of transparency in Canada is woefully inadequate. We are so far behind other countries, such as the U.K., Australia and the U.S.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Bahen.

Now we go to the New Democratic Party and Peter Julian.

Peter, you have six minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair. I hope to also have a few extra seconds like my colleague Mr. Lemire.

I thank the witnesses for joining us today.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Julian, I think the only reason I gave the extra time was that Ms. Bahen hadn't turn on her mike.

• (1140)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: If you continue in French, Mr. Julian, you will have them.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

Ms. Lafrenière, you talked about the mental health crisis we are experiencing in this country. We know that young people are under tremendous pressure, particularly because of the pandemic and the socioeconomic crisis. These young people are people who are involved in sports programs.

What do you think the federal government should do to help coaches and sports associations across the country meet the needs of athletes who are experiencing these mental health crises?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In reality, people who don't have the benefit of access to sports, sports clubs or mental health resources are much more affected. That's the reality and that's why we're trying to educate our coaches so that they have a greater understanding and knowledge of mental health issues to begin their reflection and to intervene with athletes and participants across the country.

For me, the priority is for the federal government, in partnership with the provinces and territories, to continue to discuss this topic across the country. We have the Red Deer declaration, which we could build on to continue this work in close collaboration with the entire sport system across the country. It's also a matter of having an honest discussion to identify gaps and problems.

Another aspect of the problem is that sport is becoming more expensive.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you for that.

I want to come back to the cost of sports in a moment, but I wanted to come back to your response to the question from Mr. Waugh around the issue of the screening of coaches. It has been decades since Sheldon Kennedy opened the door by speaking of the horrific treatment he had received. At that time, we thought that sports organizations were going to respond. The federal government had talked about putting in place requirements. We've found through the course of the hearings we've had with Hockey Canada and Canada Soccer that sports organizations haven't done this.

Is it your opinion and the opinion of your organization that putting in place a very rigid screening so that we can't have abusive people falling through the cracks or passing from one type of coaching to another, which creates more victims and undermines confidence for people in the sporting system...?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: That's such a complex conversation. I've seen great progress, and I see waves of improvement. Then you lose a person in the organization who believes in safe sport and it goes for naught. It really is about how, through the Red Deer declaration, we codify what safe sport means. That means, what are the actions and what are the concrete steps that need to happen?

Screening, which is just one step in prevention, should be understood across the country in its value and its limitations. It is a component of safety that's critical, just like getting the right equipment is critical. I implore parents—being a mother myself—to think differently about how they register their kids in sport. Have those conversations and lean in collectively. Also, screening has to be standardized, because we need to understand that. It's one step in the safe sport journey.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much. The federal government has a key role to play, and I thank you for going deeper in your response to his question. This is very helpful.

You mentioned the issue of the cost of sports, and we're seeing this increasingly across Canada. There's a segregation of wealthier families and poorer families, with poor families simply not being able to participate in sports. Their kids have not been given the opportunity because of the cost of sports.

What are the recommendations that you can give to us about that? Having been through the sport system myself, I know that it is such a terrific benefit in so many ways. How can we make it more accessible—and safer, of course—and more accessible to kids, even those from lower-income families?

● (1145)

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: I think we need to partner better with organizations like KidSport and Canadian Tire Jumpstart. Corporate Canada can play a very meaningful role in offsetting costs.

I mean, I respect the very demanding priorities of governments across this country in maintaining our economy in the current crisis that we find ourselves in, but I do think that governments have a role in setting and establishing a standard and a commitment to affordable sport and to drive policy across the country in helping sport organizations to do that more effectively. It's not an easy answer, and I think that national sport federations, as you know, we just talked about Hockey Canada, need to do a better job of sharing the wealth to deliver sports and—dare I say?—across sports.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Lafrenière. Thank you, Peter.

We're going to go to the second round now. However, I don't think we can do a full second round. We have a very important business meeting to have, and it takes time to get in camera, etc.

What we're going to do is the first part of the second round. I will begin with the Conservatives.

I have no idea who will begin for the Conservatives, but you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): It's Mr. Shields.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Shields, for five minutes.

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes, thank you. I appreciate the witnesses' being here today.

I have a piece here. We look at organizations...and I think that's one of the recommendations: We'll look at whether the sports organizations have policies and procedures in place.

I'm going to go to the parents on this one.

A provincial-national organization in Canada—not naming it—has it clearly defined. If you, as a parent or parents, have concerns about a coach, you go to this organization, they appoint a third party—independent—to review to see if it's worth going ahead. In this case that I know of, they did go ahead. They appointed a board person to do this. Then, the coach found out, and the coach contacted parents with emails that a parent took to the police. The coach was charged. Now that parent is in front of a commission to throw this concern out because the parent broke the confidentiality, even though the police ruled this as criminal.

Where do we protect the parents in this? The parents are being left out.

When you say they need to take an active role, it is very difficult. This is not the only case I've run across where the parents are at risk. Most of the parents in this group have backed away from it. There's one parent left. The coach may be out of this one, but they'll coach somewhere else.

What is your response to how we solve it for the parents?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: That's a complicated issue.

I would suggest that part of sport was built in the absence of sport being delivered in the school system, and I think it's still in its infancy in safe sport policies and processes. You know, you drop your child off at school and you think the school system is there and it will protect your child. We kind of apply that to the sport systems, and it's not there.

You're right. The parent can be very vulnerable, and the worry about retribution on their child or themselves is absolutely a cause. That's why unity with parents—and I'm sad for this story—is so important.

It's going to be bumpy. This is going to be a bumpy few years while this system is implemented and governments across the country grapple with safe sport.

Mr. Martin Shields: Does it drive the costs up to make it unaffordable if we do this? That's the other side of this. When you're putting in bureaucracy, you're driving costs.

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: I understand absolutely what you're saying. I think we need to partner better with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, for instance. We try to partner with them. We partner with Kids Help Phone. We partner with military welfare. That's the only way we can do our jobs. We haven't had an increase in funding in 10 years.

• (1150)

Mr. Martin Shields: In the outside communities when I grew up, the coaches alternated who umped the games. We had the community take care of that. We didn't have these issues because the volunteers did it themselves. We didn't have to have professional people doing it. We played all of these outdoor sports outside of the school. I did it. It was there before. We've lost that.

Ms. Gassewitz, do you have any opinion on what I just asked?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: Thank you so much.

One piece you identified is the role of the parents. We did hear a lot of.... The parents have so much to learn and they play such a

critical role. Your parents will decide if you're going forward, if you are participating or not.

One of the other things really speaks to education of the parents. When we're talking about safe sport, what we're seeing in some of the processes is being able to recognize what actually is bullying: What is harassment? What is chirping? What are things that people need to be aware of?

I think, to your point, including parents in the solution is a complex issue, but including parents in our education, saying we all need to learn, that we all need to be aware of it, is so important.

Thank you for raising the role of the parents, because, as a parent as well, what don't we know? I agree. We want to learn more.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Martin Shields: I have one last question.

Should Hockey Canada, with \$100 million, have its money reinstated federally?

Go ahead, Ms. Gassewitz.

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: I'm not the one.... That's a whole, complex question dealing with a lot of pieces that I'm not aware of. Unfortunately, I'm going to have to leave that one to go where it goes.

Mr. Martin Shields: Go ahead, Ms. Lafrenière.

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: I think it's early days. I think the minister's commitment to monitoring it is important. As mentioned, if only six of the recommendations are done, I think it's the ongoing vigilance to make sure that all of them are implemented....

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The time is up.

I'm going to go to the second group, which is the Liberals, and Lisa Hepfner.

Lisa, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I would like to reiterate the thanks to our witnesses for being here and for sharing such important information. It's a really interesting conversation this morning.

I think this whole conversation around safe sport has been galvanizing across the country. In my riding, in Hamilton, a couple of soccer athletes were speaking out about their hope now that they will achieve pay equity and gender equity in their sport. What I'm hearing from them, and what I heard from you, Ms. Lafrenière, is that diversity is key to safe sport.

Can you help us make that connection a little more clearly?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: Why is diversity important in safe sport?

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: Yes. Why is diversity key to safe sport? Why are those linked?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: Historically, we've had all male coaches driving sport. That has caused risk and—I would suggest—cultural toxicity around having men driving sport across the board with no gender diversity, different thoughts or different voices, with the diverse nature of Canada. We had a one million increase in population last year in immigration. The bastion of white male coaches is no longer acceptable, quite honestly.

Safety comes with diversity of thought for men, for women, for LGBTQI2S+, for Canadians, for people in Canada and for indigenous peoples. It's needed.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: Thank you.

Continuing with you, Ms. Lafrenière, you also mentioned in your opening statement—we've spoken about it a bit more—that a lot of parents can't afford sports for their kids. We also heard today that a lot of sports organizations aren't transparent with their funding.

Do you think there's a link there? Do you think that if organizations were forced to be more transparent with their funding, they would be under a lot of pressure to make sports more affordable for kids?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: I think transparency is a cultural condition, and transparency across an organization is important as it relates to issues of complaints, abuse, harassment or financial wealth. I've really taken to heart listening to that need for transparency as an organization, as part of its culture and DNA.

• (1155)

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: Ms. Bahen, would you comment on that as well? Might transparency in sporting organizations lead to greater equity among players?

Ms. Kate Bahen: I don't know about the equity, but transparency is cultural. It's an attitude. It's a belief.

On top of transparency is accountability, and exactly what we've seen in this toxic culture is that they're not accountable to anybody. They're their own private club. What happens in the locker room stays in the locker room. This is unacceptable in 2023.

It's one small piece of it to be required, if you are a large sports organization, to be open with your books and to be open with your finances, rather than have that “it's nobody else's business what we do” attitude.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: Thank you.

We've also been speaking at this committee about this idea of possibly having a database, whereby sporting organizations could

share with one another if somebody among them was facing allegations or had to leave the organization because of allegations.

What are your thoughts, first of all, Ms. Lafrenière, about the idea of a database? Do you think that would capture all of the problems?

Ms. Lorraine Lafrenière: It's an element. If we want to look at quality sport delivery, we have to consider it in its entirety, but a database is a critical step. It would mean things like Mr. Arseneault, who was a gymnastics coach in Montreal, when he had a safe sport complaint, wouldn't go and start up a new club in Edmonton to be brought back and abuse again.

My goal is for it to be established and for all provinces and territories to partner.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: Ms. Gassewitz, do you have thoughts on that, on the database and whether it would solve or do a lot to solve the problem of safe sport?

The Chair: Could we have a very short answer, please?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: I would agree with Lorraine. I believe it's an element, and I do think it would be a strong asset if we could be consistent in the sharing. If it opens up that facilitation and sharing of information, it would be a very constructive element and component of safe sport.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Lisa, your time is up.

I am going to Mr. Lemire for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Gassewitz, in your testimony to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, you said, “... we need to fund sustainable programs to promote safe sport at all levels of sport.”

I understand that you have signed an agreement with the OSIC and I would like to know how that works. Obviously, it is important to be transparent and demonstrate good governance with public money. What information do you provide to Sport Canada, and what is required of you when you join the OSIC? Do you think the office analyzes the data you submit? You had to pay a certain amount of money to join the OSIC and benefit from its services. How does this work? Does it affect a certain number of participants? Can you tell our committee what formula is used to arrive at the amount you have to pay to join the OSIC?

[English]

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: I'm sorry, but I'm actually not sure which organization you're referring to. Did you say "BCIS"? I'm not sure what that is.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: It's the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner, the OSIC.

[English]

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: Okay. It's OSIC. I'm sorry. Thank you.

Yes, you're right. It is a federally funded organization. We are all paying toward OSIC to make sure that, again, we're learning, we're accountable and we're all trying to move forward. This is that collective effort, with all embracing it to go forward to see how we can make sport safer. Yes, we are paying toward that.

I'm sorry. I got lost on what the second part of your question was.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: What is the calculation formula used? You must pay a certain amount to join the OSIC—let's say \$5,000. That varies depending on the size of the organization. How does it work?

• (1200)

[English]

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: I can't speak to everybody's calculations, because I'm not a part of those. I can speak to ours on the SIRC side, in which case the base entry point was \$5,000. The entry level was at \$5,000, so that's what ours was assessed against.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I feel that, often, only frameworks are analyzed. In the Hockey Canada case, one of the things the minister had asked for was an audit. Obviously, this would never have enabled us to know whether there was a fund within a fund within a fund that was the equity fund. In short, we would never have been able to get to the bottom of what happened at Hockey Canada with the documents that this organization is required to provide.

Do you think more should be required in terms of data analysis from organizations like the OSIC or Sport Canada?

[English]

The Chair: Could we have a very short answer, please?

Ms. Debra Gassewitz: Being a strong advocate of research, I always think there's merit to being able to look at data and being able

to evaluate and apply those learnings so that we can continue to learn more.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I will go to Peter Julian.

Peter, you have two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

I want to go back to Ms. Bahen about the issue of financial statements.

We had Canada Soccer here before the committee, and the point you made in your initial statement was bang on right. As we were speaking with Canada Soccer, we asked them about financial statements. They said they hadn't filed with Corporations Canada, as the law requires. Subsequent to that, to catch up on it, they did a week of filing going back nine years. Is it your impression that many national sports organizations are not following the basic issue of ensuring their financial statements are accessible and transparent?

My second question is related to the access of kids to programs across sports as they're growing up. Do you see a relationship between how we have these often non-transparent national sports organizations with a lot of money, while at the same time kids from underprivileged families are having more difficulty in accessing the sports programs that can make such a difference in their lives?

Ms. Kate Bahen: If I may take this backwards, I'll go with the second part.

Yes, with the high cost of sports.... Not that the financial statements tell you everything, but one of the things they do tell you is how much hockey moms and dads have been gouged over the years with higher fees. That's what allows the surpluses and reserves to build up. Maybe it was provisioning for future law settlements or whatever, but that's where the \$32 million over the years was coming from—and another \$10 million, which was taken off Hockey Canada's books and put into its foundation. You could definitely see that the moms and dads who were registering their kids were paying far more than the actual costs.

That's a good area for questioning.

In terms of financial transparency on the RCAAAs, I would suspect most charities are small organizations—under \$1 million. They probably wouldn't have complex audited financial statements, and they probably wouldn't say anything on that. We just need more transparency. They have to have a T3010A. We have to know how many full-time staff and how much compensation. Right now, it's black.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That ends our question-and-answer session.

Thank you, Peter.

Thank you, Ms. Bahen.

I would like to thank the witnesses for taking the time to answer some complex questions. I want to thank them again for coming and giving us their time.

I am going to suspend the meeting, because we have to go in camera. I think all of you have your in camera Zoom meeting link.

We shall now suspend.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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