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Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio



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• (1225)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 37 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

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.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), the committee is meeting at the request of four members of the committee to discuss their request to undertake a study of women and girls in sport.

I will now open the floor and suggest that the motion be read for the record.

I know that Andréanne was going to read this, and I know that we have a second hand up. If anyone wants to put their hand up, the clerk and I will be taking a speaking list if necessary.

Go ahead, Andréanne. You have the floor.

[Translation]

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

Esteemed committee members, I will begin with full disclosure. I spent my childhood in gymnasiums. My sister was a gymnast until her early teens. So I know all about the pressures that female athletes can face. Now I think about my niece, who, like her mother, also does gymnastics and loves it. I'd like her to keep doing and loving gymnastics. I also have a nephew named Tyler who plays hockey. I spend every weekend with him at the arenas. I'd like Tyler to be able to keep playing hockey safely because he's a young boy who has that passion for it. I'm mom to an eight-month-old girl as well, and I want her to be free to play whatever sport she wants to play, safely.

On the other hand, of course, I read the news last week just like everyone else. Together with my colleague, MP and Bloc Québécois sport critic Sébastien Lemire, I also took part in the discussions about Hockey Canada this summer.

Hockey Canada attracted a lot of attention, but as we've seen in the news over the past few weeks, the problem extends far beyond Hockey Canada. Women in many sports, such as water polo and gymnastics, have reported abuse. I could name many more sports and the list will continue to grow.

This morning I met with Ms. Shore and Mr. Kohler, who came to the office to let us know that this is now a women's issue. It's an issue that requires a thorough study into its root causes. We need to understand why abuse remains so common and how to change the culture in the sports world.

There's been physical abuse, but there's also been psychological and emotional abuse. With that in mind, I introduced the following motion last week:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee immediately undertake a study on sport and the status of women, including the physical and emotional health and safety of women and girls in sport; that the committee allocate four (4) meetings to hear testimonies and that it invite to testify Ms. Pascale St-Onge, Minister of Sport and other witnesses that the committee deems appropriate to invite; and that the committee report its observations and recommendations to the House.

As I said, I saw the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage get things done this summer in a non-partisan way. All members were there to discuss this issue. Now we have to look beyond hockey. Other girls and women doing other sports are waiting for us to show them the way and inspire them to take charge of their situation.

We know that sport is a source of empowerment for many young girls. Sport is also very much tied to the dropout rate. A passion for sports can often keep young people in school, and we need them to keep that passion alive.

Therefore, let's address this issue together to put an end to all forms of potential abuse. As members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, let's lead by example in the most proactive way we can, because we can do it in a non-partisan way.

Thank you.

• (1230)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Jenna, you have the floor.

Ms. Jenna Suds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Andréanne, for bringing this forward and for sharing your rationale for bringing it forward. It's certainly an important and topical issue in our country right now. I certainly do support us exploring it.

I do have an amendment that I'd like to suggest. I'll explain my rationale before I read it.

First, it's to ask that we first finish our mental health study. I ask that, in that we're almost there. I think it would be worthwhile to finish that off. We have the ministers scheduled to come and provide their testimony shortly. I think it would be wise of us to get that study finished as well, which we all know is on a really important issue.

Second, I would suggest that, rather than just reporting back observations and recommendations to the House, we actually table a comprehensive report. I think it's certainly a topic that is deserving of that, so I would suggest that we go to that extent.

The Chair: Is that the amendment specifically? Do we need an amendment? Is this an informal amendment, or could we start having this discussion?

Ms. Jenna Sudds: I have two amendments here technically. Do you want me to read the first one? Would that be helpful?

The Chair: We can do only one amendment at a time.

Read the first amendment. I will remind the committee that when we go into an amendment, after the initial motion is brought forward, the debate will be on the amendment. Once we have decided on that, we'll go back to the original motion with amended amendments.

Go ahead, Jenna.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: Okay. I'll do the first one first then.

It is:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study, following the completion of witnesses on the study of mental health of young women and girls, a study on sport and the status of women, including physical and emotional....

The rest is the same. It's to specify that we finish our witnesses first.

The Chair: Fantastic.

I have a speaking list. It's Michelle followed by Leah, but I'm going to take the floor.

I'm sorry, guys, but it's the chair's prerogative here.

To give you an idea of what's happening, on Thursday the meeting will be cancelled. It is going to be our fall economic statement, and we have just been advised of that. When we return, it will be November 14 when we have our last panel. We have both Minister Ien and Minister Bennett for the mental health study, and that is our last panel.

The following meeting is, I think, on the 17th. I've been working on a lot of things this week, let me just say, so I think the 17th would really be the first day we could start. That would put on hold the reports and doing version one of our murdered and missing indigenous women and girls study, which of course we know is very

important, but we'll work with Leah on that. Then we'll have our mental health study with those versions as well. We'll be able to do this while the versions are being done and go from there. I just want to put out the time frame for everybody.

Jenna, thanks very much, but there's only one panel remaining, and that's the minister.

I want to bring everybody that information as we carry on.

Michelle, the floor is yours.

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

I think what's important to point out is that everybody on this committee cares about all of these issues. We have a bunch of fires burning right now, and it's a matter of deciding which one to put out first. It's a really big struggle, as I said earlier, with respect to the witnesses testifying. This is such a challenge, because we have so many things. I know everybody must feel that they want to help everything and everyone at the same time.

Andréanne's motion came forward, and it is pertinent as are other things. To MP Sudds's amendment recommendation, I think this deeply overlaps with youth mental health. I actually think they are very much intertwined, because if you are not safe in sport—which is supposed to be a safe space for many children to get away from, escape and be safe from abusive or traumatizing homes or possibly indigenous homes—and the bar for normal is abuse, then we have a massive problem.

This is unearthing a lot of wounds for a lot of people. I spoke with a gymnast yesterday whom I had interviewed when she was nine years old. She was on trajectory to go to the Olympics. I told her I was really curious about what she thought about this motion being brought forward to status of women. She said something really powerful, which I think we all need to appreciate. She said, Michelle, it's like I've just been catapulted into my nine year-old self and you've opened up a big wound that I thought I had dealt with, and I hadn't.

I think you're going to see Andréanne's point, because this is coming out in the news. It's a MeToo movement for sport in a lot of ways for a lot of people. I think it is our duty in this committee to investigate it.

I want to work with everybody to ensure we're doing the best job we can to ensure safety. I would definitely say to MP Sudds's point that this absolutely involves youth mental health. If we have only one more meeting anyway, I think it's a matter of doing this.

I think it's a great motion that you've brought forward, Andréanne, and it's extremely important.

● (1235)

The Chair: The speakers list starts with Dominique followed by Leah followed by Sonia.

Dominique, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, esteemed colleagues. I look forward to being with you in person again.

I really like Ms. Larouche's motion. However, something about the wording scares me. It's so broad that I fear we're missing the point. I don't have an amendment. I haven't prepared one. I'm just sharing my observations.

First, I'd like the committee's work to include a review of the media situation, what we've seen and heard, that is, what's been brought to our attention as Canadians about the unfortunate situations that have developed.

Next, perhaps we should focus on the state of affairs in terms of sports teams and federations.

I'm thinking of my son, who played hockey for a long time, and of my nieces who, like Ms. Larouche's niece, practice other sports.

What federation rules are currently protecting people who play sports? The applicability of these rules should be studied and best practices identified.

I believe that's what we should be focusing on. That being said, I haven't put together a written motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have to interrupt, because I'm going to remind everybody that we have to go back to the amendment.

Dominique, I really appreciate everything you have on the record, but we need to look at the amendment.

What we really need to look at is whether we have agreement with everybody that we are looking at the ministers coming on that day and then immediately starting....

I guess part of the thing is, and perhaps this is where the clerk can clarify—and we'll get back to everybody—that we are finishing off this mental health study, but we also want to make sure we can speak to the minister on this as well. I think that's one of the issues.

If we have the minister on the 14th, Minister Ien, would we be able to invite her back? She may be one of the witnesses we want to speak to. Do we have to stick to the mental health study only, or could we expand a little on our conversation to talk about sport with her on that Monday?

An hon. member: It goes hand in hand.

The Chair: It does go hand in hand. It's really up to us.

I'm looking at the group, and I think overall, we would be in agreement to let the ministers come regardless. That's the right thing to do on the 14th.

Andréanne, I'll get back to you.

I'm kind of putting out there that this is where I think this conversation is leading to.

I'm going to have Leah followed by Sonia, and then I'll go back to Andréanne.

Let's get part one figured out, and then let's go to part two.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): I just want to be perfectly clear. We have only one...for the mental health study.

The Chair: We have one panel left.

Ms. Leah Gazan: First, I want to thank you, Andréanne, for putting this forward.

One reason why I've enjoyed being on this committee is because we're talking about this as a non-partisan study on sport. I think we've handled all studies that way on this committee, particularly because of the fact that we specifically focus on women, girls and the diverse gendered. That's a topic that needs more discussion throughout the House. I've been very pleased, and I'm always happy to be on this committee.

I also think the study Andréanne has put forward is extremely important, which is why I signed on to it. I think everybody agrees this study is really important. However, it's too important to overlap.... We have one meeting left on mental health. I agree that we need to finish that one meeting on mental health. I support the amendment being proposed.

I think we need a comprehensive study on this. We've seen it in the news and heard about it for many years. There's this critical Hockey Canada investigation, right now. We've heard it on the news. You brought up gymnastics. This has been in the news forever. It requires a real study with real investigation and a thoughtful time allocation, so we can get to the bottom of this.

I also think—as we've talked about in the House of Commons—that we are in a mental health crisis in this country, right now. We need this study finished, so we can give information to the people across Canada who can help, in order to support the work they're doing.

One thing that was brought up was the study I put forward to this committee on the relationship between resource development and increased incidences of violence against indigenous women and girls. I would say that is also a crisis of safety. We know this was put forward as a concern in the national inquiry. In that study, we were heeding one of the calls to action in the national inquiry, which is really important.

Since we were talking about time, I propose that we finish the study on mental health—the one meeting. Then, we will start the study on sport, given the fact that there is public interest and concern. I think there are moments in history when you have to respond to public concern.

As a reminder to this committee, I have also postponed my study twice now. Here's what I have to say about that: Indigenous peoples in this country.... As a House, we recognized, in unanimous consent, that what happened in residential schools was genocide. I am willing, because I am always thoroughly committed to addressing violence against all people—women, girls and the diverse gendered. I need specific timelines. Our women cannot always be treated like an afterthought. We need to balance this.

Like I said, if I didn't think this study wasn't a critical one, I would not have signed on to it without a thought. However, we also have to have that thought in terms of mental health, increased violence in sport, and the epidemic levels of violence against indigenous women and girls in communities. I'm just going to put that on the table.

I support that amendment.

Thank you.

• (1240)

The Chair: Sonia, I'll go to you. I'll make some comments after that.

Sonia, you have the floor.

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

I support the amendment Jenna proposed.

I totally agree with Leah. We have been working together very well, and collaboratively. We completed an IPDV report and a resource development study. We are about to wrap up our mental health study.

I know we all want to see greater representation of women and girls in sport, at all levels. It is true that Canadian women and girls continue to face barriers to full participation and representation in the Canadian sports system. We all want that.

Every study we do is a good study, because we care about that.

On the amendment, I agree that beginning the study on the 17th is the best approach. It gives us the time parties need to submit witness lists, and for the clerk to send those invitations. Again, I support this amendment.

With that, thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1245)

The Chair: Thanks very much.

If you don't mind, I'll take this directly to a vote.

All those in favour of supporting the amendment to begin this study after the last panel of mental health witnesses is seen?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Amendment one passes. We will be starting after the panel with the ministers.

Let's go to amendment two. Once you do that, we'll start the conversation again.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: As mentioned, amendment two keeps the consistent wording but adds at the end “and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response to the report”.

The Chair: The government's response.... It's not just a letter, not just saying “we received it and thanks very much”. We want to see something.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: Yes: a comprehensive response.

The Chair: Is there conversation from that?

I know that Andréanne had her hand up, and then we'll go back to Michelle.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We've all voted and we've come to an agreement to finish off the last panel. That's done. That's basically the gist of my remarks, that I agreed. So, as I understand it, according to the schedule, we can start at the November 24 committee meeting.

No. Sorry.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: It's the 17th.

The Chair: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: It will be November 17.

Okay. It will be after break week. Minister Ien is appearing on November 14. So we will start on November 17.

That's perfect. That's what I wanted to clarify.

I also agree that after this decision, we could continue our other study. After the mental health witness panel, we still have to finish the report on Ms. Gazan's study. We'll have to see how that affects the review timeline for the study on Indigenous women.

Can we get a clarification on that?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, absolutely. I have the calendar. We'll reschedule and look at the calendar, of course. We were going to be doing version one of the indigenous study. That was what we were focusing on. On our human trafficking and sexual exploitation study, the witnesses were due on Friday. On that one, we'll be delaying starting our fourth study. Then, on the mental health study, usually these guys are three to four weeks on getting a study, and then we get that through translation. Those would be some of the things.

We will make sure that everything we do is very transparent. For anything we can find out from translation, and for whatever we may do, we'll make sure that everybody is advised and a new calendar would be available.

My only question for you is that when we're talking about "comprehensive", we talked about four meetings, and I know there were discussions on that.

Michelle, I'm going to pass the floor to you and then to Anita.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thanks, Madam Chair.

Yes, that's my question. With our comprehensive study, just because it would be bigger... I support the amendment for a comprehensive study. I think it makes way more sense to do something properly. I am just curious. Do we still keep four...? Is that enough? That's what I'm asking. Or do we have to put that into the amendment? I'm not sure.

The Chair: I'm just having a quick chat with the clerk. We're basically looking at the wording at the bottom of what Ms. Sudds, Jenna, has indicated. This is something that would be simple to vote on. We're just saying to the government that we want more than just a response, that we want something bigger.

We could look at that and then we can start going... I opened the can of worms before I should have, so what I would like to see is if everybody is in support of Jenna's amendment for an actual comprehensive response. All those in favour of the government with a comprehensive response...?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Happy, joyful: We're moving forward.

Okay. Now we're looking at going back to Michelle and whether four meetings are going to be enough. We could probably do one sport in four meetings, unfortunately, but we have to look at what it is that we want to accomplish. I think four meetings will open the can, and what do we do from there? Perhaps there should be a bigger discussion on that.

We have Michelle, followed by Anita.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: If we're sticking with the four meetings, taking into consideration what Leah has commented on—to not push back her study again—that would be my concern. Can we effectively do this in four meetings? Can we really hunker down and be really concrete so that we're not pushing Leah's motion further back? I think she has shown incredible grace in what she said today, because it is absolutely important that we study that fire that's burning as well.

That would be my suggestion. As a woman and as a mom, I feel confident that when you give us a really hard task, we can do it, but I think we have to be really concrete in who we're going to have as witnesses if we're going to have only four meetings.

• (1250)

The Chair: Awesome.

I'm going to go to Anita, followed by Leah, followed by Andréanne.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think we've been very good in this committee of not being too prescriptive. If we see by the third meeting that we need... I think the committee can probably gauge that. I've seen some really good reports come out of four meetings or less, in fact, so I think we should give the chair a little bit of leeway in that, also depending on how many witnesses are proposed.

The thing I want to also say is that we could give the chair some leeway with the calendar. If the study on indigenous women in resource extraction is ready and the analysts have finished it, perhaps the chair could schedule in a meeting in between somewhere so that we can approve that study and get it out. It's something that's probably important to get out before the holiday season.

I think we can all agree we don't need to have a motion around this but just give the chair a little bit of latitude in these regards.

The Chair: I will do my best, Ms. Anita!

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I will do my best!

Ms. Leah Gazan: I have another proposition.

The Chair: Oh, good. Okay.

I'm going to Leah, and then you can propose to me anything you want.

Go ahead.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'll defer my time to Andréanne first, and I'll leave my comments until after.

The Chair: Super-duper.

Andréanne.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We've all agreed to begin the study on abuse in sport on November 17. I propose that we have a meeting to review the report as Ms. Gazan suggested. We have no more witnesses to hear. We will have a meeting, or two at the most, on Ms. Gazan's report.

I suggest that we can then begin the study on abuse in sport and alternate the meetings between two subjects, as we sometimes do on this committee. I suggest that we do two meetings on sport, and then we can decide if we need to extend the study. However, while we're thinking about it, we should have a meeting about the report on Indigenous women and girls. Then we'll come back to the sport study.

That way, we will alternate between the subjects. Rather than trying to find another meeting date, which we may not be able to do, we could already plan that after the first two meetings on sport, we can stop and decide if we need more than four meetings on that. That way, we can finish Ms. Gazan's report.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excellent.

Leah.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Getting back to my point about how fabulous our committee is—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Leah Gazan: —as role models for the House of Commons—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Leah Gazan: —I think that's a very gracious compromise. I think both issues are quite urgent. I would feel very happy to have the two meetings, as Andréanne suggested, reserving one meeting for us to finalize the report. I also think that will give us more time to put witnesses forward and really think about it. It has just kind of come about. It will give us more time to be thoughtful about witnesses.

The Chair: I absolutely appreciate that. Thank you very much.

I don't have anybody else left on the speakers list.

What it looks like, from what we've agreed on, is that we would start the study following the mental health study witnesses. We will start the study, have a couple, figure out where the heck we are and what we need to do, and then revert and start looking at this study. We can go through version one and continue to work. We can do both of them. This isn't a problem. We have the best staff ever, so that's something that's very, very possible. I can tell you that, from the weekend and things like that, I know there is a lot of interest.

Jenna, go ahead.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: That's amazing. I love the compromise and the teamwork here.

I just want to flag something. As we start to put together our witness lists and who we will have as witnesses on this study, I do think we should reflect on whether some trauma-informed training is necessary.

The Chair: Actually, I already started that conversation. We were doing the human-trafficking one, and I wanted to make sure that everybody was empowered.

I'm going to pass that over to Clare because this is her job.

Ms. Clare Annett (Committee Researcher): Thank you, Madam Chair.

If the committee wishes, Dominique and I have been working with the clerk to think about some ways the committee could have a meeting or a session on trauma-informed questioning of witnesses, but also on ways in which the people in the room, the members themselves, might seek help in getting through these tougher studies. We're looking at it from both of those angles. If the committee

is looking for that kind of information, we can definitely draw together some experts and bring them in. A briefing note and everything would be prepared as well.

It's up to the committee and the chair.

• (1255)

The Chair: What I'm going to do is have our clerk read out the final motion. We just need approval of that.

Go ahead, Clerk.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Alexie Labelle): The motion as amended reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake, following the completion of witnesses on the study of mental health of young women and girls, a study on sport and the status of women, including the physical and emotional health and safety of women and girls in sport; that the committee allocate four (4) meetings to hear testimonies and that it invite Ms. Pascale St-Onge, Minister of Sport, to testify for one hour, as well as other witnesses that the committee deems appropriate to invite; and that the committee report its observations and recommendations to the House.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Dominique, is this a question before our vote, because I was just about to vote? Do you have a question or a comment?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I have no questions about it, but I do have a brief comment to make before the meeting is adjourned.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, fantastic.

We'll go to the vote on the motion.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: It is unanimous.

It's November 4, Friday at noon for witness lists. Golly gee, we have to get on this.

I am already getting some saying that we need to get these witness names in.

She is asking for our first group of witnesses on November 4.

I know you have a comment, Dominique.

Go ahead, Anita, and then Dominique.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Actually, I have a motion.

We just did something at the Subcommittee on International Human Rights. It is possible in a particular study for the committee members to make available the employee assistance program, on a one-time basis, for witnesses and members. I guess members have it anyway, but we can make it available to the witnesses in a particular study.

I would move that we do so for this study.

The Chair: This is to ensure that everybody has the supports they need while we're doing this study, and extending those services to the witnesses, not just to us here at the House of Commons.

Do we need any more discussion on that?

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Easy peasy.

Okay, Dominique.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a special request for the analyst and her team.

With respect to the briefing note that you prepared, to save us from wasting very valuable minutes on questions addressing these

situations, could the researchers pay special attention to what currently exists to protect athletes within the federations?

Do the federations have protocols, policies and the like? How are these policies applied on a day-to-day basis?

If we could have an overview of what's being done in Canada about this in the briefing note, I feel that would be very helpful.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're going to be asking for all of the witnesses lists—by Friday for witness lists.

Of course, as the study is going, we also know that there may be other things, so like everything, we will be flexible. We want to make sure we get the best study possible.

Seeing no further questions or comments, I will ask for a motion to adjourn.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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