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# Standing Committee on the Status of Women

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 048**

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Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio





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• (1540)

[English]

**The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)):** Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 48 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on October 31, 2022, the committee will resume its study of women and girls in sport.

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

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

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

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

As a reminder, I point out that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

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

I'm going to remind everyone with the following trigger warning that this is a very difficult study. Before we welcome the witnesses, I would like to advise everybody that we'll be discussing experiences related to abuse. This may be triggering to viewers, members or staff with similar experiences. If you feel distressed or you need help, please advise the clerk. Also, you have the team here: We always try to make sure that everybody is in good shape. If there are any issues, let us know.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses. As individuals, we have Lanni Marchant, Olympian, athlete advocate; and Andrea

Neil, former women's national soccer team player and assistant coach. From the World Association of Icehockey Players Unions, we have Sandra Slater, president, North America division; and Randall Gumbley, consultant.

We'll be providing each of you with five minutes for your opening comments. I try to be flexible on this. When you see me start rolling my arms, try to bring it down to within 15 seconds.

I'm now going to pass the floor over to Lanni.

Lanni, you have your five minutes.

**Ms. Lanni Marchant (Olympian, Athlete Advocate, As an Individual):** Thank you for having me.

My name is Lanni Marchant. I'm an Olympian in the 10,000 metres and marathon, a former Canadian record-holder in the marathon and half marathon, graduate of the University of Ottawa and Michigan State's colleges of law, and a licensed and practising attorney admitted to the Tennessee bar and the federal eastern district bar of the United States.

I have spoken to you previously. In October 2016 I testified here about my experiences as a female national team athlete. In my testimony six years ago, I highlighted the maltreatment and abuses I suffered at the hands of my federation—the sexism, ageism and sexual harassment that I experienced from my own Olympic teammates.

To quote my own testimony, I said “There is...little understanding of the development of a female distance runner...and...that age does not necessarily dictate results. The funding of athletes like me, over 30 and female, often comes with performance requirements that are not set on younger athletes or equally on our male counterparts.”

I further went on to state that “We expect our teammates to have our backs, not to comment on our backsides. We do not need men in the sporting world to proclaim that they stand behind us as feminists because” it gives them the perfect view “to comment on our behinds. Instead, we want them to stand beside us.”

I did not realize during my previous testimony that we were on the brink of the #MeToo movement. Perhaps if I had been more timely with my discussion points, I would not have been trolled, harassed or further victimized online and by the sporting community.

Since my testimony, I did not sit back and wait for you—my government—to step up and help fix the very broken system I was expected to compete and thrive in. Instead, I took my experiences, my education and my desire to leave sport in Canada better than what I had experienced, and I joined forces with AthletesCan to be part of their safe sport work group. As part of that group, I and several other athletes—some of whom have appeared here before you—worked together on the maltreatment prevalence study that was circulated to current and recently retired national team athletes.

In 2019, I became a member of board of directors for the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada. I am now in my second term. As a board member, I sit on the complaints committee and the sport integrity committee. I'm not privy to the individual cases that come to the SDRCC, nor do I serve in any decision-making capacity on cases.

I also chair the newly created athlete advisory committee, which falls under the umbrella of the abuse-free sport program here in Canada. My role there is to ensure that the athlete voice is heard and considered in the decision-making processes of the OSIC activities. Again, I'm not dealing with any particular cases, but creating a system that is athlete centred.

It has been over these past six years of working with different sport and athlete agencies that I realized I was not alone in my experiences of maltreatment. It is where I realized just how normalized it is for athletes to be abused, demeaned and suffer—all in the name of sport.

I grew up a figure skater. I skated at the Champions Training Centre out of Cambridge, Ontario, which is also referred to as the Kerry Leitch figure skating school. I started there when I was in grade three and stayed through my first bit of high school. While there, I was weighed weekly, fat-tested monthly and had the results posted on the wall for all to see. I was a preteen female and was made to share the dressing room with skaters much older than me—male included. It was normalized to be yelled at to the point of tears and heaven forbid you get pulled into dressing room number six with Kerry Leitch.

If you were not perfect, you were made to run laps of the parking lot. I guess the silver lining is that running those that laps, for me, turned into running laps of the Olympic oval. Many of my teammates were not nearly as fortunate.

Nipple grabbing and discussing the development of my body were a daily occurrence, with older girls passing along tips on how to stay small, skip periods or avoid going through puberty altogether. Male coaches and fellow skaters would prop us up on their laps to have “chats”. Because it was a pairs training centre, it was normalized to have parts of your body touched by men and boys to demonstrate lifts or moves. Their hands would linger. The entire culture was toxic and overly sexed.

I left that environment when I discovered running. My body dysmorphia stayed with me. I was fortunate to find my coach, Dave Mills, at the London Western Track and Field Club. I do not know if I would have survived my high school running career, and professional career since, without him.

My university experience was not any different from my skating years. Yes, I was in the U.S. NCAA system, but I imagine it paralleled the experiences of my Canadian counterparts. There, eating disorders were part of what it took to be on team. Coach Gautier would openly discuss his favourite parts of our bodies. He would slut-shame the female runners and celebrate the guys for their dating activities.

Any systems we had back then did not provide any solutions and certainly did not provide any protection for us, the athletes.

In speaking up, we should not have to be afraid of losing our scholarships, our funding, our spot on the team or access to services.

• (1545)

How is it that my experiences in sport—dating all the way back to the 1990s—and the fear that those environments thrived off of are still those same experiences described by athletes half my age today?

I have done my best over the past six years to help be part of a fix for the Canadian sport system. I have to ask, where were you?

We have the abuse-free sport program up and operating in Canada, but why has it taken so much pressure for you to let it have any teeth? Why do we have to wait until this spring to see it be mandatory for every national sports organization to sign on to the program?

It's been proven over and over that NSOs cannot be trusted to self-regulate. Athletes are not protected. NSO investigators ignore pleas from witnesses to look at the entirety of the toxic environment of a club and skating centre. The goal always seems to be to protect the brand and the status quo. The concern falls more on protecting the career of an accused rather than the experiences and career of the athlete.

Athlete complaints are not a standard HR complaint. We often do not have any lateral moves or other places to go. It isn't like we can just go and pick another country to represent.

In 2016, the high performance director of Athletics Canada, Peter Eriksson, was fired for his abuses of power and maltreatment of national team athletes, only to then be hired by Own the Podium.

Sport in Canada is incestuous. Where and how are we meant to feel safe? Where was my protection when I was pegged as the athlete to get Peter Eriksson fired? Why did my testimony here six years ago fall on your deaf ears?

To pursue a sport and represent Canada should not mean a decision between risking our physical, mental and emotional health to achieve our goals, or the alternative, which is to walk away completely because the system is broken.

Athletes are screaming for a sporting system to provide a safe and protected space for us to speak up. We have been asking for one and are now demanding one. After the maltreatment prevalence study demonstrated a toxic sport environment when we demanded an independent mechanism for safe sport, why did the application process require and mandate that it be built and housed within an already existing entity?

I spoke up six years ago. I'll quote it again:

I meant it very much when I said that the athlete can't be the one who's constantly taking on these battles.

I don't know why.... The women before me weren't making teams, but they weren't standing up and arguing as loudly as I am. I don't know if it's because of the background I have or because, at the end of the day, I don't care. I want to represent Canada, and I would hope you want me out there representing you, but if you don't want me there, then fine, I'll find something else and excel at that. It might take more money and it might take more time, but the government and the different federations—Sport Canada and the COC—need to have our backs. If I'm willing to stand out there and be vocal and face the retribution or retaliation of my federation, I would hope that I'd be able to rely on you and on the bigger federations to come to my aid when I do need it.

We, as athletes, are now asking for more.

I understand that my perspective on the abuse-free sport program in Canada is unique. I've had a very unique view of its creation because of my roles. I understand the fear and disbelief in any system that is born out of programs and systems that were already in place.

I am not here to champion or tear down any program. I know the work that we put in. I know the goals that we have.

I'm here because I understand the importance of protecting athletes at any age and regardless of any ego—yours and mine included.

I'm here because despite everything I know about maltreatment and abuse in sport, I was still subjected to grooming and taken advantage of by a sports practitioner later in my career. My mindset and scope was so narrowly focused on stopping predators and abuses of those younger than me that I had a blind spot. We cannot afford any more blind spots.

It isn't my job to fix sport in Canada. It isn't any athlete's job. I have done everything that I knew to do to try, though. I suffered the retaliations. I had my Canadian teammates call me “low-performing Lanni”, because without an Olympic gold medal, how dare I ask to be respected as an athlete and treated as a human?

I ask again, what did you do in these past six years to better sport in Canada? What are you actually prepared to do now?

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

As you're noticing, I am letting athletes go on a little bit longer. I do recognize that this is very difficult testimony to give. I do want to provide that extra respect for them coming forward.

Thank you so much, Lanni.

I'm now going to pass the floor over to Andrea Neil.

Andrea, you have five minutes.

**Ms. Andrea Neil (Former Canadian Women's National Soccer Team Player and Assistant Coach, As an Individual):** Thank you, Madam Chair and members of this committee, for inviting me to speak today and for your work in investigating these critical issues.

My name is Andrea Neil. I'm a former player, captain and coach for the Vancouver Whitecaps and the Canadian women's national soccer team. I spent 18 years as a midfielder, participating in four FIFA Women's World Cups as a player, a fifth as a coach in 2011, and a sixth as media in 2015. When I retired, I had the most international appearances of any soccer player in Canadian history. I have my UEFA “A” coaching licence from Italy. I was the first woman and third soccer player to be inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame.

I have played sports my whole life. I know that it can be an incredible platform for honourable accomplishment, human development and positive social change. Unfortunately, a pervasive, toxic and unhealthy leadership paradigm in our culture today harms many people who participate and work in sports. It is a paradigm that uses as its compass points the accumulation of power, prestige and money, not the development, support and safety of those they are meant to nurture and build.

I know that my speaking time is limited today. I will use it to share some examples from my soccer career that illuminate key areas to address if sports in this country are to be the flourishing developmental ground that we need to them to be.

I am involved now as my child learns to play, and I have long coached various age and playing levels. My deep connection with the women's national team program runs from its founding members to players still on the team today. For years, and as recently as a week ago, I have observed and listened to countless stories of mistreatment, abuse and corruption. A single instance should be unacceptable. The unrelenting pattern of repetition is alarming, and it must be learned from.

For 15 years I stood alongside a small group of women as they risked their financial, physical, mental and emotional health to bring former national team coach Bob Birarda to justice for his sexual and psychological abuse of players. When I saw that Canada Soccer had quietly dismissed Birarda as a coach, conveniently shrouding the firing as mutually agreed, and therefore enabling him to begin coaching girls again months later, these women took their experience to the police to prevent future harm.

Canada Soccer could not be counted upon. Our national federation had completely failed at safeguarding. They had irresponsibly shifted his predatory behaviour on.

These women have been dismissed, diminished and devalued as human beings by those who are responsible for keeping them safe. Even now, with Birarda's abusive behaviour across 20 years of coaching established in a court of law, culminating in his guilty verdict and jail sentence, these victims are still waiting for a statement from Canada Soccer and are still waiting for Canada Soccer to ban him from coaching.

The federation's response has been to insist that their first failed investigation was thorough and extensive to avert from rather than take responsibility. Only pressure by the Olympic champion women's team forced a further inquiry, which resulted in the revealing, however incomplete, McLaren report.

Players have had to join hands across generations to force the current management in our national federation to begin to do the right thing and to properly look into things. I wish I could say I was surprised by the obfuscations and lack of accountability, but I had seen this sort of dodge before, when my vantage point as an assistant coach in the national program made me aware of deeply concerning financial improprieties and organizational irregularities, which I helped raise to no avail.

Real leaders pay attention. They look and they listen. But when athletes or staff have flagged concerns about Canada Soccer, this has not happened. In fact, they've been dismissed. Those brave enough to call on them to do better have not been protected. Some have suffered retributions; others have been silenced and smothered by non-disclosure agreements and clauses in employment contracts.

• (1555)

We have seen, with Hockey Canada, that a lack of safety and a lack of transparency around funding are not two distinct problems. They reflect leadership that has lost its moorings. These issues combine and intersect to impede the development of people who deserve to be striving and thriving through their sport.

My purpose is to use these examples to highlight the need for a new leadership paradigm, one based on trust, service, community, equality, consideration and care. What kind of culture has Canada Soccer created in the past? What kind of culture will it set out to intentionally build now? Unfortunately, it has proven time and again that it cannot regulate itself.

I call on our government to take meaningful action in support of transforming sports across Canada. Here are three crucial calls to action.

One, we need a judicial inquiry into the culturally ingrained abuse within our national sporting organizations. I appreciate your convening this forum for feedback. Nothing can change until we turn the lights on and reckon with where we are.

Two, we need to rebuild our sports organizations with this self-scrutiny in mind. We need to clearly establish and communicate the portals for feedback and commit to looking into what they bring up. We need to make policies against retaliation for reporting. In a culture so awry, whistle-blowers are essential in raising awareness and getting us back on course.

Three, we need to commit to a comprehensive forensic audit into Canada Soccer's finances and to publicly disclose how funding is

being used and why to ensure the mission of the organization is being carried out ethically and effectively.

Until we see things clearly and courageously create a new leadership culture in these organizations, the vulnerable members of our society will continue to be put at risk, and the harm that I have all too often witnessed in my career will continue to happen.

With awareness, effort and a heart-centred compass point, we can head in the correct direction, but not without also investigating within ourselves what blocks our ability to see, support, protect and care for other human beings when they're in need.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Andrea.

I'm now going to pass it over to the World Association of Ice-hockey Players Unions. We're going to have Sandra or Randall, whoever would like to take the floor. It's for a total of five minutes.

Thanks.

**Ms. Sandra Slater (President, North America Division, World Association of Icehockey Players Unions):** Thank you.

I'm Sandra Slater, president of WAIPU North America. We're here today to discuss athletes' rights in sports.

The year 2022 was the first year a female was drafted into the Canadian Hockey League, the CHL. We are also here to discuss female management entrance into a male-dominated sport.

As a female trying to break the glass ceiling, I have personally experienced disrespect bordering on abuse and discrimination by the CHL and previous executives of Hockey Canada—and I emphasize “previous”.

As we witnessed at the heritage committee, the hockey industry is dominated by an all-white male, 60-plus years of age, and a long history of not recognizing women's influence in sports. As part of our documentation, you will see a letter from the CHL showing lack of respect for female leadership. We are here today to create awareness in the hope of creating change for athletes and female recognition in management positions.

This experience is not limited to the hockey community. My personal feeling while addressing issues with the federal and provincial governments went unanswered as I am a woman and because Hockey Canada's executives challenged WAIPU's integrity after we notified the federal government of sexual abuses and hazing in correspondence dating back to 2018.

A prime example is that WAIPU contacted the Minister of Sport and requested an urgent meeting to discuss sexual and hazing abuses within the CHL. Nine months passed; we heard crickets.

Upon retaining a lobbyist, the CHL was able to meet with the minister within 30 days to discuss, of all things, additional funding for the CHL during COVID.

We also have submitted what we feel is a solution that would not only educate athletes about various forms of abuse but also be used as a reporting tool.

Now you'll hear from my co-worker.

• (1600)

**Mr. Randall Gumbley (Consultant, World Association of Ice-hockey Players Unions):** I'm Randy Gumbley. I'm a consultant with WAIPU.

You're about to hear a story about a deeply flawed business model between the CHL and Hockey Canada that exploits young children. We use some strong language such as "cartel", "conspiracy" and "collusion". These words that we express don't come lightly and are not used without merit.

In 1968, then prime minister Pierre Trudeau appointed a special task force to investigate amateur sport in Canada and the effects that professional sport had within the amateur system.

The task force found that amateur and professional sport should have no affiliation. They demanded that immediate and drastic actions be taken in the following areas: the supremacy of the hockey system, the binding of minors to contracts, contracts that denied players' rights and indentured players in a form of slavery, and how major junior hockey operated under the guise of the amateur system.

The Downey report of 1976 recommended the following changes: the creation of an ombudsman for hockey; the prohibition of teams from entering into contracts with minors; restriction of contracts and conspiracies that prohibited players from having the freedom to associate both in inter league and intra league; and the separation of pro and amateur sports. These recommendations helped form what is known as section 48 of the Competition Act.

Sadly, a half century later, these young children are still at the mercies of the NSOs in a cartel-like hockey group with the very same issues that are still alive and well today.

To Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and to this committee, your father had a vision to protect amateur sports and athletes in Canada. You passed laws to protect those athletes, but, sadly, history has shown that all levels of government have failed to enforce the existing laws. This government now has an extraordinary opportunity to follow in his footsteps by enforcing the existing laws and recognizing athletes' rights.

The Competition Bureau of Canada received a complaint from athletes in 2018 that involved the cartel hockey groups, and alleged criminal violation of section 48. The bureau took nearly four years to review the complaint. While athletes faced a real threat of feared reprisal from NSOs and the CHL for speaking out about abuses, the Canadian government still turned a blind eye to the blatant viola-

tions of the Competition Law, child labour laws, CRA regulations and human rights violations.

WAIPU believes that the government's primary responsibility is to protect the rights and freedom of all individuals, including children and athletes. We believe that the government must monitor, check, and, if need be, curtail the powers of NSOs that exist that exercise unreasonable restraints upon athletes' rights and freedoms.

The direct result of the government non-action is quite evident. It created a higher supremacy within the hockey community that hockey was untouchable and above the laws of Canada. This allowed a cartel to be formed, which runs right up to the very top echelon of hockey, the National Hockey League.

The system as it stands today has a power imbalance in favour of the NSOs. This has dramatically affected competition and has put athletes in a vulnerable position.

Canadians and this government need an inquiry to fully understand how we got to this point. Why did the Competition Bureau of Canada take four years to act on the complaint? Why are minors subject to a \$500,000 release fee if they choose to leave the Canadian Hockey League and offer their services to another organization? Why did the NSO allow a professional sports league to benefit from insurance that was paid for by the amateur system? Finally, how is the CHL able to lobby across Canada, not only the provincial governments but also the federal government, to change laws in the middle on an ongoing litigation?

I thank you for your time.

• (1605)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for the testimony we have heard.

We will be going to our questions. The first round of questions is for six minutes each. I will try to keep it tight to those six minutes so that more members will get the opportunity to ask questions, because, when I allow it to go on for too long, then we will get fewer questioners.

I'm going to pass it over for six minutes to Michelle Ferreri to start it off.

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

I really want to thank our witnesses today. There's a lot of bravery here today and a lot of honest testimony. You can't change facts if you don't face facts, so I really appreciate all of your being here today. There's some pretty damning testimony coming from all of you.

The first question I have is for Andrea.

Do you see an overlap between what Mr. Gumbley and Ms. Slater have said on soccer and hockey? Do you see an overlap there of what they're saying?

**Ms. Andrea Neil:** I think, for me, this goes to leadership principles that have gone completely awry for what the purpose of sport is all about. There are so many links to what I've just heard and retributions for speaking up. I think we're just so completely lost with what this is all about.

If you have more specific questions, I'd love to focus this more.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Yes, for sure.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm seeing a major problem with the process. You go up the chain, you make a complaint, you do everything you're told to do and nothing is happening. I'm getting a lot of nods.

Sandra, you said you went to the federal government and made the complaint. What happened then, and what is your next call to action to see this through?

**Ms. Sandra Slater:** Well, nothing happened.

Randy, you did have one meeting, right?

**Mr. Randall Gumbley:** Yes.

**Ms. Sandra Slater:** Randy was able to get one meeting with them, but nothing came out of it. That's why we're still here.

Understand, with the abuse that's been suffered, any elite athlete—any athlete in an elite position—is vulnerable to anyone in power. They truly control your life and your dreams.

We, as parents watching our kids in a sport like that, live vicariously through our kids. We want them to have our dreams. These kids don't say anything to anyone when these abuses happen. When you finally hear it after the fact—after they've finished what they're doing—it's heartbreaking. And time after time after time, you hear the same stories.

Let me give you an example: Daniel Carcillo. My goodness, the class action lawsuits.... Okay, this is going to be graphic for everyone here. That man had a hockey stick shoved up his butt during hazing by older players. What are 16-year-olds doing playing with 20-year-olds in a league? Sorry.

All of these issues need to be addressed. We need to be listened to, and we're not being listened to. What's been going on? We've been fighting this cause for 10 or 11 years now.

**Mr. Randall Gumbley:** I will say that we took steps. The first step we took was that we reported it to the CHL. That fell upon deaf ears. We went to the NSO, which was Hockey Canada. That fell upon deaf ears. We went to the provincial governments. What did the provincial governments do? They changed the laws to favour the NSOs by changing labour laws. Then we went to the federal government and we complained about the issues that Sandy is talking about and why we're here today. Nothing.

This is not just with this minister. This minister has actually taken some action, and we're hopeful for it. We've been reporting this since 2010, with Bal Gosal, and they're the same issues.

When you're talking about the steps we took, the player's last resort was to go to the courts. What happened? We ended up with four major class action lawsuits that have put Hockey Canada in an uninsurable position. For them to be able to access O and D insurance now, it's \$2.1 million a year just for the premium. Who's paying for that? It's the amateur system and those players who are participating, and it's all because of the CHL's flawed business model.

• (1610)

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** If we can get to the crux of this conflict of interest.... I think that's what we're seeing repeatedly in this: it's who knows who, and not doing what's right.

If I may, Andrea, you were talking about this coach. I'm wondering if you can expand on that. Are the people the same at Soccer Canada who allowed all of this to happen? That seems like a massive conflict of interest if the people you're making the complaint to are the people overseeing it.

**Ms. Andrea Neil:** Yes. It's a pattern of behaviour, and why I shared with you that I can talk to the founding members and to the players now who are on the team is that when you step back and look at the pattern of behaviour throughout, you can see it through a different lens. It becomes very clear.

When the reporting mechanism happens, the people investigating it decide the scope of that investigation. It depends on the perception they have and their decision-making process around it.

With this example, they were very much focused on on—it looks like—the reputation of their own organization. The players were never really considered and cared for in the decision-making process. Their entire lens was focused on more self-serving means and not on the actual role, that they are there to support the players.

You realize that over time, this pattern continues. There's dismissive language and denial of responsibility, and on and on it goes. The people involved can never get their healing.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We're now going to pass it over for the next six minutes to Anita Vandenbeld.

Anita.

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



I want to thank you for being here. I know it's not easy to tell your stories. I really appreciate that, because you're not just looking at yourselves; you're looking at trying to stop the harm from happening to other athletes, and that is something that matters.

I'd like to start with you, Ms. Marchant.

First of all, what happened to you is unacceptable. Now you're a lawyer, so you understand processes and legalities. What do you wish you would have had as an athlete at that time that might have made things different? By extension, what would have made a difference for you in processes and support?

**Ms. Lanni Marchant:** It would be a safe place, somewhere where I could complain and talk about what was happening to me, and it not be investigated by the people I was complaining about. That's how it works. When I was growing up in the skating system, Skate Canada used to have this program called "monitoring". I wasn't quite at the level, but my sister was. If you were a national team athlete back then, you had a monitor assigned to you who was supposed to be taking care of your interests. These monitors would come and see the abuses at our club. If my abuse was bad, I cannot even speak to what my sister went through being at a higher level than I was, and what it did to her. This person would see it and basically say, "Okay, well, that's sport". It was the mindset of, "Well, I had to live through it, so now it's your turn".

With Athletics Canada and my experience there, I should not have been deemed the athlete responsible for Peter Eriksson's getting fired. I definitely played a role, I'll acknowledge that, but I ticked all my boxes. I did everything I was supposed to do, and I almost got left off a second Olympic team. I didn't get to go to the 2012 Olympics because of politics, so for 2016, because my name was more known, and because at that point I was the fastest woman in Canada, I had the community speak up for me. Even behind closed doors, right up until I toed the line at my first Olympic event, he was trying to get me removed from the team. In what world does an athlete get to thrive under those conditions, where your head coach does not even want you there?

I don't know if what happened out at the University of Guelph is on the record here. Dave Scott-Thomas was the coach there, and he was also the high-performance distance coordinator for Athletics Canada. It was known that he was carrying on inappropriately, raping an underage athlete for years. The first national team I was on was with her and Dave Scott-Thomas and his wife. I cannot imagine the terror and horror that she had to go through knowing that everybody called her crazy. She was so gaslit. It took over a decade for him to be pushed out of the sport and for someone to believe her story.

What I want, and what I think every athlete wants, is to be believed and to be heard. We don't want someone to push it under a rug or say, get to the next race, get to the next event, or do you know what? Even this allegation against this person could damage their reputation and their career.

I didn't even get my Olympic ring. When you compete at the Olympics you get a piece of jewellery; mine got lost in the mail. I did not even ask for them to send me another one for years afterwards, because I didn't want anything to do with my Olympic experience. It had nothing to do with the running—I'm proud of the run-

ning. It had to do with everything else that got me to that start line and through those races.

• (1615)

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** The kinds of things you're talking about are unthinkable and completely unacceptable. I'm really grateful that you're telling us about this. What really alarms me is not just that you didn't have a safe space or that you weren't believed—and I've heard this from Ms. Neil as well—but about the retribution when you did try to speak out.

We're looking at processes. We're looking at how to solve the systemic problems that seem to exist. We're hearing about this normalization that you talked about across so many sports. I know we've put some processes in place, like OSIC and others. What is it that could create that safe space, not just for whistle-blowers who want to file a complaint, but also for the athlete and their psychosocial needs, the support? You don't always just get there from saying, "I want to file a complaint." You need to have options, support, advocacy, understanding, and maybe go through processes before you get to that.

What would that process look like?

**Ms. Lanni Marchant:** I would say, and we were talking about it earlier, that.... My human brain is very smart; I've got a lot of letters after my name that say I'm a really intelligent person. My athlete brain is stupid; it is dumb.

I am really good at running reasonably quickly in mostly straight lines—I know that. We need a system that's almost paint by numbers, because not only are athletes so focused, and to get to the level that I got to, you have to dial in and rely on the people around you....

I ran on a torn labrum for four years. It wasn't until I lost my funding and got booted out of the system that I got it fixed.

We need a program, because when you're under that stress and being abused, it literally needs to be paint by numbers; it needs to be something we can just follow through with our very dumb athlete brains.

**The Chair:** Lanni, thank you so much for having a sense of humour—and running in a straight line.

Thank you so much, because you know sometimes we just need to have a little bit of joy, so thanks for that funny remark.

I'm going to pass it on to Andréanne Larouche for the next six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to thank Ms. Marchant and Ms. Neil for their testimony.

My reading of the testimony is that sport cannot be governed solely by itself. The courts in Canada are laying the groundwork right now to finally give athletes more rights. There's still a long way to go, but the #SportsSurvivor and #MeToo movements are an inspiring start.

It's creating a movement around the world, starting with parliamentarians on the Hill and university researchers as well.

Mr. Gumbley, thank you for making us aware of the fact that sport must comply with many laws that fall under the jurisdiction of departments other than Sport Canada.

Could you provide some details on how the Competition Bureau handles complaints? This seems to me to be a good illustration of how quickly the government responds when sport organizations make a request, compared to how quickly it responds when athletes who are victims of abuse file complaints.

• (1620)

[English]

**Mr. Randall Gumbley:** From our history, what we learned was.... I'll use the analogy that when we filed a complaint with the Competition Bureau in 2018 on a certain clause that was in the player contract, there was \$500,000 release fee that was mandated if the player in the CHL wanted to leave the league to go to play in any other league other than the National Hockey League. Under section 48 of that act, it's clear that the law says that it's a criminal indictable offence if an organization imposes an unreasonable restriction upon an athlete. What we got back from the Competition Bureau was a four-year delay in determining what was unreasonable. They could not determine if \$500,000 was unreasonable and they said that the law was imposed in 1975 and that no one had ever acted upon it, so now we're going to change the law. We're not going to act on that.

The time frame that happened with that was impossible to understand. We filed a complaint in 2018, the Department of Justice did an investigation in 2019, and then we heard nothing until Hockey Canada got called to the mat at the heritage committee hearings for the abuse and the payment of funds. I got a call on Canada Day, over a long weekend, from the investigating officer at Heritage Canada telling me that they're not going to act on the complaint. To me that was unacceptable—for it to take four years to find out if someone could determine if it were unreasonable to ask \$500,000 from a 16-year-old when he only makes \$50 a week. This is the action that we got—and this is not the only area that was there in this regard.

I don't even think that we need more laws. We have enough laws; we just have to enforce them. No one enforces them because they're NSOs they believe in.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** You certainly have more information to share with the committee on how the Canadian Hockey League operates and how it affects athletes.

Would you like to see a recommendation to go back and repeal the changes that were made to labour laws without consultation?

The Canadian Hockey League, which operates across Canada, is subject to federal labour laws.

[English]

**Mr. Randall Gumbley:** Yes, for sure. Our position has always been that they should have been considered federal employees. They cross borders. They play internationally, across the U.S. border. They play within provincials...and we believe they should be considered federal employees. That would be the easiest thing to solve that issue of classifying these players as employees of the clubs.

Remember, the federal government already classified CHL players as employees in the 2001 Canada Revenue Agency court case, which held up upon appeal. However, no one ever enforced that these players were employees. In fact, it went the other way. The provincial governments said they were going to disregard the federal and were going to say, after the laws were changed, in order to mitigate damages in a class action lawsuit for non-compliance and wage and hour theft, they'd stop the clock from running and allow the teams to get off.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** I have one last question for this round.

There are at least four class actions currently authorized in hockey, and several others in a dozen sports. They are all related to abuse, mistreatment and economic abuse as well.

May I assume that you have spoken with senior officials at Sport Canada and the office of the Minister of Sport?

Should we broaden our definition of “abuse” to include abuse that is monetary or economic in nature, as in Quebec?

[English]

**Mr. Randall Gumbley:** Justice Perell, in one of the court cases, stated that abuse comes in many forms and that financial abuse is one of them. These players within the CHL are definitely financially abused. Every province across Canada turned a blind eye.

I don't blame the ministers for changing those laws. They were lobbied under the false and misleading information they received from Hockey Canada and the Canadian Hockey League.

I believe changing the federal law to classify CHL players as employees would be the first step.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're now going to pass it over to Leah Gazan.

You have six minutes.

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

Thank you, everybody, for being here today.

You said something, Madame Marchant, that really hit me. There were a couple of things, actually, that really hit my heart. You said “believing”, like “we just want to be believed”. I think when you believe somebody, you respond with action.

You testified in 2016. You're back here. Clearly, there's not been enough action.

You also spoke about your “stupid” athlete brain. I would say your “battered brain”. This really hit me, and it demonstrated to me how deep this labelling is.

As I go through this study.... This is very new to me. I was not sporty. I barely passed my gym credits in high school. It was a battle at the time.

This is all very new to me. However, in the study that we've had, it's becoming very clear to me that the systems that are in place are not working. There's OSIC. You talked about NSO and Hockey Canada. They're not keeping athletes safe.

However, there seems to be a lot of push-back from federations in response to calls from victims for judicial inquiries. I know that you have a legal background. I wonder if you could share why you think there's push-back from federations right now for a judicial inquiry.

**Ms. Lanni Marchant:** It's not that I don't think OSIC is effective or can be effective. I was part of the SDRCC, which put in the request. The government put out a call for applications to create a safe sport and abuse-free sport program. They asked for that to be housed within an existing entity, so the SDRCC put forth its version of what they wanted abuse-free sport to look like, and we ended up with what we have now with OSIC, the safeguarding tribunal, etc.

Where I would say the athlete brain and NSOs are coming into it is the NSOs don't want a separate system. Whether it's housed in the SDRCC or completely independent, the NSOs want to keep investigating themselves to allow it to continue to go on. They all have their own investigation systems or their commissioners, who do *x*, *y* and *z*, and that's not working.

As long as they can tell the athlete, “Don't trust the system. Keep it with us. We'll investigate”, there's no way they can do this well enough. They don't have the expertise in this area of sport. You're already not going to get the athlete buy-in, so whether it's OSIC or any other program, as long as we keep allowing the NSOs to have as much power and control as they have, no system is ever going to be fully functioning and working.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** It is becoming very clear to me that it's not functional. You shared a story that's horrifying.

The thing is—and this is what gets me in this study—that we've known about this forever. I've seen so many documentaries on TV. Knowing about abuse in sport is not new to me. Knowing about the governance structure of sport is certainly new to me. We've known about abuse in sport for a long time.

You spoke to the government, saying that it needs to listen and to act.

What could the government do tomorrow to make sure this abuse stops?

**Ms. Sandra Slater:** First of all, regardless of the person reporting the abuse, take it seriously. It came from somewhere. Do an investigation of it. Don't leave it there. Investigate it.

Don't rely on the NSOs because whatever policies, procedures and reporting mechanisms they have in place, they're clearly not working or these abuses would have been handled. They would have been reported properly and the government would have heard about them. They would have been reported.

• (1630)

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** In terms of investigation, Mr. Gumbley, you said that you filed a complaint about the \$500,000. Canadian Heritage got back after several years, saying they were not going to take action on the complaint.

I'm asking this because it seems to me that government departments are aware this is going on.

Do you feel that they know what's going on, but they're failing in terms of taking appropriate action?

**Mr. Randall Gumbley:** That's right.

It was the Competition Bureau. Let me tell you how fast the Competition Bureau acts. On September 15, 2020, a class action lawsuit was filed against the Canadian Hockey League, Hockey Canada and the NHL for anti-competitive acts.

Within days, the Competition Bureau came out and issued a statement to protect the NSOs in hockey, saying it would not pursue criminally those who were involved in price fixing. The Competition Bureau came back within days of Hockey Canada and the NSO coming back in 2022, to protect the NSOs again.

The Competition Bureau failed miserably to enforce the laws that were on the books and it failed to protect the competitive balance within the leagues.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Do you feel that because of all of these failures, you would support the call for a judicial inquiry?

**Mr. Randall Gumbley:** One hundred percent. There needs to be an inquiry into how all of these steps and various levels of government—not only the federal government, but the provincial governments—missed it.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Yes.

**Mr. Randall Gumbley:** How did the CRA miss \$150 million in revenue within Hockey Canada?

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Yes.

**Mr. Randall Gumbley:** How did the provincial governments miss that those players were classified as employees? Then they changed the laws to protect them and took away their [*Inaudible—Editor*].

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We're going to get to our next round. Our next round will be for five minutes, five minutes, two and a half minutes, and two and a half minutes.

We're going to start with Anna Roberts for five minutes.

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses. I'm really encouraged by your bravery.

Lanni, I love your dog. I rescue dogs, so every time I see a dog, it just opens up my heart.

My question will be for you, Lanni.

In your testimony, you talked about the abuse and being trolled by the Olympic teammates. Can you share with us some of the comments that were said?

**Ms. Lanni Marchant:** Oh. Um.

**The Chair:** It's whatever you're comfortable with.

**Ms. Lanni Marchant:** It's more about trying to clean up some of the language.

Essentially, when I testified the last time, I spoke about everything, but I wasn't as candid as I am now. I wish I had been, but it shows where I was at, I think, in my healing journey. The last time I was here, I had to be very surface-level.

Even with that said, I spoke about how we lose young girls from sport because.... If you are going to sexualize and objectify me out there, what do you think the 13-year-old cheering for me, whose body is changing and who already, through society, is being hit with all these things about how she's supposed to look and be.... Now, instead of commenting on my performance, you're commenting on my behind. Do you think that little girl wants to go and race in small shorts and a small crop top? No. I made comments about that.

What was received online.... I was basically told that I should have come here in my panties, in order to show you all what I'm really all about. How dare I show up here, dressed professionally, if I'm going to race in my skivvies out there? No one cared to ask me why I race in the kit I race in. Sometimes, that's all the sponsor gives you. Running does not pay the bills like other professional sports do. You are not going to upset your sponsors, especially as a female athlete. It was comments like that.

When I spoke about the harassment and abuse from some of my teammates and what it's generally like to be a female athlete out there, I was told what we all hear, always: If the statement had been made by a good-looking guy, I would have bent over and taken it. However, because it came from someone who wasn't attractive, of course I had an issue with it. It's the same stuff we hear whether we're in sport or not.

The fact is that I was brave enough, then, to come here and call out those behaviours. We didn't see anything happen from there. However, I was still expected to compete and try to make more national teams. Knowing this was how my testimony was received by

athletes and the public at large was more than disheartening. To sit here and talk about the ageism and sexism I experienced.... I even said, in my 2016 testimony, that I would lose my funding the next day. I lost my funding the next day.

Where was Sport Canada? I am literally telling you that there are policies in place in my NSO saying I'm too old and that as a female, I have to hit this benchmark for competing. However, if I were 25 or male, the benchmark would have been here instead, and I could have kept my funding. The NSO, Athletics Canada...that was their policy. Sport Canada's response was, essentially, "They are the expert in your sport. We're not going to step in. We just give the funding based on their policies."

I pled to you all. I said, "It can't be the athlete doing it." Did anyone check whether Sport Canada changed that policy at Athletics Canada? No one here did. That policy eventually got softened, but that's because Peter Eriksson got pushed out. It had nothing to do with Sport Canada or this government changing anything.

• (1635)

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** My next question is this: In 2016, you mentioned the negative feedback you received about appearances, which you just explained to us. It's absolutely appalling. Have you felt any pressure regarding your appearance here, today, as you did in 2016? Did you get bullied? Were you threatened? Did any of those situations occur?

**Ms. Lanni Marchant:** I actually didn't publicize that I would be testifying here today.

Ironically enough, trying to figure out what I was going to wear.... I remember being so nervous, the last time, because the blouse I wore had sheer sleeves. I thought I wasn't dressed. Because of my education and what I do in court, I felt it wasn't necessarily the most appropriate attire. However, I was at a training camp in Flagstaff when I got asked to come speak, so I brought what I had—that blouse. This is very sheer today, but it was a white one with sheer sleeves. I felt I was dressed inappropriately, wearing that. I still got trolled and ripped apart. How dare I dress the way I dress when I compete?

This year, I opted for sheer again, because I think it shows my personality a bit better: I really am going to wear what I want to wear and compete in what I want to compete in.

No, I hardly let anyone know that I would be testifying here today, outside of my family.

**The Chair:** That's great. Thanks.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** That's great. Thank you for your honesty.

I know my time is up, Madam Chair.

You're beautiful, so don't change.

**The Chair:** Jenna Sudds, you're on for five minutes.

**Ms. Jenna Sudds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I will share in my colleagues' thanks to you all for being here today and helping us understand and navigate, as we work to make sport better for Canadian athletes.

I'd like to direct my first questions to you, Ms. Marchant.

One thing you talked about earlier was wishing that you had a safe place. I think it's important, as we go through this work, to make sure that we give thought to how to better support the mental health of athletes. We've heard this a few times from other witnesses.

I wonder whether you could speak to what support you wish were in place, now or moving forward, for today's athletes, to ensure that their mental health is protected.

**Ms. Lanni Marchant:** I would like to say thank you to Leah for acknowledging that the athlete brain can be a battered brain, and these probably are synonymous, unfortunately.

I think trauma-informed practices are of vital importance. If an athlete is going to speak up, it might not necessarily be to the person they're supposed to speak up to. They're going to just turn and say, "I need help. Help me." Everyone involved in the sporting world from the grassroots up needs to know what to do with that, and if you don't know what to do, go find someone who does; but don't leave the athlete standing there, because it takes courage for us to even admit that something might not be right and to say, "I don't think this is right", or "This is making me feel a certain way", or "This is so hard, I don't even want to compete anymore". By the time you get to the point that you say it to someone, the fact that you're pushing the air out of your mouth and getting it out is the hardest step.

We need trauma-informed practices and, whether you're a coach or a bodywork specialist, it really doesn't matter. That first step of any athlete disclosing abuse needs to be to someone who understands just how heavy and how hard that moment is in that athlete's life.

• (1640)

**Ms. Jenna Sudds:** Thank you for that.

One of the other comments you made was about this system having teeth. You spoke to the fact that come this spring, it's mandatory for the NSOs to sign on with OSIC in order for their funding to be provided.

I wonder if you can speak to your thoughts on that and whether you think that will improve the situation.

**Ms. Lanni Marchant:** Yes, I think we did it backwards. I don't understand why we created a system and then did not make it mandatory. It should have been mandatory from the get-go. Sport, unfortunately, is tethered to funding, and NSOs don't exist without it, so why weren't they required to be part of this system?

Whether people want to buy in or believe that OSIC can work or not is a separate discussion. You have to make everybody part of it before you can even have any understanding of how well it will work. To have athletes believe in a system, they need to see that their NSO is on the hook to it and falls under that umbrella.

Athletes have fought so hard for something like the abuse-free sport program here in Canada. We fought really hard, and it might not be shaped exactly how we wanted it to be, but the frustration is that we at least got a little bit of the taste of something, and you're going to tell me that my abuses don't count because my NSO made the decision not to sign on? It absolutely should have been mandatory from day one.

**Ms. Jenna Sudds:** Thank you for that. I respect and appreciate those comments.

As we move forward and we see that NSOs are going to be required—and I open this up to anyone—or are required now to sign on, do think that will have an impact to improve the situation?

**Mr. Randall Gumbley:** I'd like to address that, Madam Chair.

I'd like to read something to you: "Please be assured that the Government conducts a thorough and rigorous screening process to ensure that all federally funded NSOs, including Hockey Canada, maintain a well-defined governance structure and code of conduct." That was a letter from the Minister of Sport sent to me in 2016 and 2018. At that time, Hockey Canada definitely did not have a well-defined structure or code of conduct. As we know now, they failed that miserably. Nothing was done.

In our situation, the CHL does not fall under Hockey Canada. It does not fall under the NSO. It does not fall under this type of governance. They would have to sign on to that individually, because they are in limbo. They claim that they're amateur to get amateur breaks on insurance, but they're a professional league. They have players, 168 players who play in the league, who have salaries in excess of \$300 million. How is that an amateur league?

Therefore, one of the areas that we have is that the NSOs need to be held accountable. The funding to Hockey Canada means nothing, but we think that the appointment of the NSO, which represents at the Olympic committee in order to qualify for world championship games, is the bigger carrot that the government could impose. If they don't fall within funding, we're going to find another organization and another board to represent those athletes, and that could be across the board.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

I'm now going to pass it over, for two and a half minutes, to Andréanne Larouche.

Andréanne.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Marchant and Ms. Neil, thank you for your testimony. I think it confirms that we really need an in-depth review of what is happening in all sports in Canada. It's not a matter of reviewing only one sport at a time, one element at a time and one scandal at a time. We really need an independent, broad-based inquiry to get to the bottom of this.

My next question is for Mr. Gumbley.

You mentioned the issues of the Competition Board of Canada. Can you explain in 30 seconds what you meant by that statement?

[English]

**Mr. Randall Gumbley:** The Competition Bureau fails to enforce the laws of Canada, and that resulted in the players going to the courts, which has caused now Hockey Canada's insurance to skyrocket. It's an \$826 million class action. It's a lot of money.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Ms. Slater, you wanted to share your experience and the tactics used by sports organizations, which in your case are Hockey Canada and the Canadian Hockey League.

You have tried on a number of occasions to raise awareness of athletes' problems, or you've appeared before provincial parliamentarians to give your testimony. Do you think this is a good illustration of the power of sport and the power it's given itself?

• (1645)

[English]

**Ms. Sandra Slater:** Absolutely, yes. I went to the Quebec National Assembly to try to fight the changing of the law to get the kids removed from the labour law, ESA, and I was literally threatened the Friday before with a lawsuit for libel if I said anything. I was threatened with that.

Upon that, I was going to bring a player. He chose to come with me, and an agent was going to come with me. That agent chose not to for fear of reprisal, that he would lose and not be able to have any more young players come to him to be their agent.

He took it very seriously. He regretted not going. I didn't care because I did the right thing. I had to speak up for these players. No one else was going to do it.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Thank you very much, Ms. Slater.

At the outset, I mentioned that it would be important to conduct an independent public inquiry to shed light on all sports.

I would like someone to answer the following question: If you were to comment on the importance of such a survey, would you say that it could make a difference?

[English]

**Ms. Sandra Slater:** If we have the right people in place who actually listen, I do believe that change can happen. What did a principal say? I've been fighting things my whole life. I have children—

**The Chair:** Sandra, our time is really short.

**Ms. Sandra Slater:** Okay, I have to say this. Unless you expose something and let the sun shine on it, it will not heal. It's the exposure of these things that is going to cause change and awareness—end of it.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

We're now passing it over to Leah Gazan.

Leah, you have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you so much, Chair.

This is horrifying because we know this is going on, and from the testimony it's clear there is not enough action. We're talking about the abuse of kids, and we are also talking about the harassment and fear of people coming forward.

You said something, Madam Marchant, about not telling anybody that you were coming here because of fear of reprisal. Are you afraid of people coming after you? Has that occurred?

**Ms. Lanni Marchant:** I just didn't want to deal with it until I have to. Obviously this is a public record and it will be streamed, and I have a thicker skin and a better system....my support animal is here with me. I've a better way of handling it this go-around than I did in 2016, but I just didn't want—how do I put this?—people who are already the naysayers and the people who aren't necessarily the biggest fans of me to tune in and just try to find another reason to troll me.

I'd rather that if people happen upon this and listen to my testimony—they don't have to agree with me—they are looking for it because they are interested in it. They are not looking for it to poke holes or to try to tear me down like they did in 2016.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you very much.

Madam Neil, where do you work right now?

**Ms. Andrea Neil:** I work for the Coaching Compass, my own company, on leadership training.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Okay.

What does that employment contract look like? One of the things that...is this kind of practice of non-disclosure agreements—and I'm not saying this is true of your contract. Is your contract, even though it's...? Are you required to sign a non-disclosure agreement that prevents you from discussing matters in detail?

**Ms. Andrea Neil:** One of the clauses within my contract from when I worked for Canada Soccer as an assistant coach prohibits me from talking about certain details: financial, personal, organizational. To show up here means I'm invoking the parliamentary privilege to do so, but if I talk negatively against the federation, I risk being sued.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Okay, so, there seems to be this code of conduct in place that favours the federations and organizations and not necessarily the athletes. Is that...? Do you agree or disagree?

• (1650)

**Ms. Andrea Neil:** Absolutely. There are, I think, the formal codes of conduct and then the informal codes of conduct, and people within the organization can pick and choose. In my case, when I reported with the Bob Birarda situation, it was anonymous. When I reported certain financial irregularities, it was me and the head coach at the time, and there certainly were retributions at that point. I hadn't signed a contract; retributions were happening. I—

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Can you give me an example of retribution? What does a retribution look like?

**The Chair:** Leah—

**Ms. Andrea Neil:** A retribution....

So, everything was great before.

**The Chair:** Oh, Leah, it's all good.

**Ms. Andrea Neil:** It was something along the lines of being offered a contract before and then having a great difficulty being paid after. I had a certification that was blocked in the process, as well. Everything was great before. Then after, there were cases, and it went on for two and a half years.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Leah, you're really good at this because you know with me that I'll just let you keep on asking, eh?

Thank you so much to the panellists for being here today. I think, as we're shining the light on what we're seeing—this is one of our last days—you're really bringing to light the need to look deeper into some of these things. I do thank you all for coming, and I hope that.... I recognize for, specifically, two of you coming as individuals.... I hope that you will be able to leave this place with no harassment, no trolling, and continue to be strong for coming here and standing up for the rights of all athletes. Thank you very much for putting all of the weight on your shoulders; there's a whole bunch of us who will help you carry that water. Thank you so much.

We're going to suspend just for—

Oh, Randall, you had—

**Mr. Randall Gumbley:** Just one—

**The Chair:** Randall, we usually don't. I'm kind of closing.

I will be suspending for about a minute. We have to get some people online, so we'll be switching panels.

Thank you.

• (1650)

(Pause)

• (1655)

**The Chair:** I would like to reconvene with the second panel for today's study.

Today we are welcoming in the room, from AthletesCAN, Andrea Proske, vice-president. Online, from the Canadian Paralympic Committee, we have Karen O'Neill, the chief executive officer; Michelle Killins, the director for Paralympic performance and pathways; as well as Erica Gavel, a Ph.D. candidate and a vice-chair.

Online we also have, from Swimming Canada, Ahmed El-Awadi, the chief executive officer.

Each organization will be provided with five minutes for opening comments.

We will turn the floor over to Andrea Proske for the first five minutes.

**Ms. Andrea Proske (Vice-President, AthletesCAN):** Thanks so much.

My name is Andrea Proske. I'm a rower, a two-time World Cup medallist, Olympic champion and AthletesCAN vice-president. I also stand before you as a survivor of a toxic training environment. Sadly, it is not a new story. However, if you'll bear with me, I also bring concrete proof that Olympic medals can be won through culture.

Unlike other athletes you may have heard from, I began sport at the mature age of 27, as a hotel manager with years of leadership experience. En route to the national team, I would brave numerous setbacks and serious injuries, including being struck by an SUV. Through it all, I persevered, because I wanted nothing more than the privilege of wearing the Canadian maple leaf on the world stage.

Neither my decade of real-world experience nor my resilience would spare me from the abuse that followed. While Rowing Canada shone on the world stage, for four years, our national training centre environment allowed for 46 women to experience manipulation, isolation and abuse by an autocratic coach who ruled our lives, Dave Thompson. Physical punishments were meted out for perceived indiscretions, teammates were seen as rivals to be beaten, selection race results were kept secret and booking time with a physiotherapist considered a sign of weakness. He controlled the minutia of my life, restricting me from seeing health care professionals, mental health professionals and talking to my support network.

The ripples of his culture of fear went well beyond the athletes. I'll never forget a support staff worker telling me, I wanted to quit so many times. but I couldn't because I knew for you women it would be worse for you if I left: You'd have no one to protect you. Every time I was told I was too fat, too slow, too difficult, I believed him a little more. The environment became normalized, steeped in favouritism. He was a master manipulator who openly told me he preferred working with younger athletes. They followed directions. They didn't ask questions.

I worried when athletes commented that he would end phone calls with "I love you" and not hang up until they said it back. I worried about his buying gifts for them. I worried about the one-on-one coach's meetings in his hotel rooms. My deepest fears were realized later when I learned about the private dinners, sexual harassment and sexual abuse that my teammates endured.

I'm trying to forgive myself for silently witnessing this abuse. In many ways, the Olympic medal came at the cost of my own self-worth. Too many times I had to choose between my moral compass and my Olympic dreams.

In 2020, Rowing Canada quietly let Dave Thompson go before a safe sport investigation would confirm the bullying, harassment and abuse. He went on to work for other countries, and even an all-girls school. There are no words for how angry this makes me.

However, I promised you a happy ending. Our wonderful new coach, Michelle Darvill, inherited a group of burned-out, broken women and immediately prioritized rebuilding culture, trust and teamwork. She would say strange things like, "Good job. I'm proud of you." At the time, it felt nothing short of revolutionary.

We were encouraged to show our unpolished selves, be vulnerable and hold each other to account. Gone was the secrecy of the previous regime, replaced by complete transparency and open communication. For the first time as a national team member, I felt I owned my journey. I was creating culture from the bottom up. I was driving a training environment that I could thrive in. We were reimagining high performance. I welcome any questions to speak more deeply on this case study.

I have since seen my story reflected in countless others across Canada. We are witnessing some of the strongest women in Canada reach their collective breaking point. If 2020 was a time to listen, then 2023 must be a time for action. Here are three steps:

One, OSIC services need to be accessible to all levels of sport and adequately funded, with culture tied to NSO funding.

Two, we need a comprehensive and compulsory education for sports stakeholders on all types of abuse. We need bystander training.

Three, we need a restorative justice approach that does not cause victim retraumatization. I am so grateful for being here today, but, as you can see, it is tough to sit through this emotional scar tissue and relive it.

In closing, when I started working with Michelle, I knew it was up to us to prove that her method of coaching could win medals. Here I stand, Olympic champion, showing you another pathway to gold. It's not an easy one. You will need to show the perseverance and confidence and courage that women across the nation have shown.

Every athlete knows the podium doesn't come overnight, but I know this: Canada can stand on the world stage as a champion.

Thank you.

● (1700)

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Andrea. We are here to support you. Thank you so much for coming. We're standing up with you and standing by your side as you come forward. Thank you.

I'm now going to turn it online. We'll have the Canadian Paralympic Committee. I'm not sure who is going to take the floor for the committee, but you will have five minutes.

It looks like Karen has her microphone there.

Karen, you have five minutes.

**Ms. Karen O'Neill (Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Paralympic Committee):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people. I respectfully recognize the first nation, Inuit and Métis peoples across Canada.

In listening today to the experiences shared by Lanni, Andrea and Sandra, I would also like to recognize all who have come before to share how they faced abuse, and those who still live with trauma silently.

I'm accompanied by Paralympian CPC board member and athletes' council vice-chair Erica Gavel; and CPC staff member Michelle Killins, who is the director of Paralympic performance and pathways. We are all available to answer any of your questions when the time arises.

The CPC, or Canadian Paralympic Committee, is a non-profit organization with 27 member sport organizations dedicated to strengthening the Paralympic movement and inclusion through para sport. We work to create a safe, inclusive and welcoming culture, a culture and environment that supports each participant, while respecting and valuing their experience, voice and diversity, whether on the field of play or in their development as individuals and leaders. We are guided by athlete leadership and experience to create greater access to opportunity that is safe, supportive and welcoming.

I'd like to share a few examples.

Our flagship athlete discovery program, the Paralympian Search, was consistently yielding significantly lower participation from women, a reflection of systemic under-representation of women with a disability in sport. In response, Paralympian Elisabeth Walker Young, who also works in diversity, equity and inclusion, was hired to develop the framework for a pilot event focused on women's needs with the goal of providing a safe and welcoming space for women and girls on their para sport journey.

Also, to better understand women and girls' experiences in para sport, several projects were conducted to support safe and inclusive environments. They included working with national sport organizations that collected data from team members so that their athlete experiences and voices were heard, were held, and would lead to positive change.



As well, a research study on safe, inclusive and accessible sport was completed by Paralympian Stephanie Dixon and her colleagues. This and other Paralympic-specific research on safe sport were completed because most data and insights from current research were not as inclusive nor as representative of a Paralympic athlete's experiences. In addition, at a leadership level the Paralympic movement is strengthened by the fact that the CPC board of directors includes a high ratio of female Paralympians: Erica Gavel, Michelle Stilwell and Cindy Ouellet. In addition, our CPC athletes' council also includes Paralympians Ina Forrest, Erica Gavel, Amy Burk and Abi Tripp.

These individuals reflect their own experience directly on diversity, equity, inclusion and safe sport and, through their leadership, contribute towards reimagining our sports system going forward.

Several building blocks to a safe sport culture across Canada include absolutely ensuring that more women, more diversity and more athletes with a direct voice are supported in leadership roles. Second, the concept of education was mentioned several times—to be clear, on not only what it looks like when it's not safe, but also on what a quality, inclusive and safe sport environment and culture looks like.

Governance was also referenced several times this afternoon. We need to look at some of the assumptions and implicit biases in our current governance infrastructure and policy.

Lastly, the federal, provincial and territorial governments must ensure strong, collective and focused leadership to address safe, inclusive and quality sport.

In conclusion, the CPC believes in belonging through sport. We are committed to a quality, inclusive, welcoming and safe sport environment. This is non-negotiable. We are definitely committed to doing better.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Ahmed El-Awadi, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi (Chief Executive Officer, Swimming Canada):** Thank you for inviting me to speak here today on behalf of Swimming Canada.

I would like to thank the committee members for all their hard work and investment in this imperative topic. I would especially like to acknowledge the athletes, victims, their families and their friends for having the courage to be here and share their experiences and their stories.

I've been the CEO since July 2013. I would like to share a glimpse of our sport and our organization. We consist of over 75,000 registrants in addition to thousands of volunteers. Our women's team is in the top six in the world, and accounts for many of the best performances Canada has ever seen. Across officials and athletes, we are virtually fifty-fifty in terms of men and women. In participation with the Lifesaving Society, an estimated 1.5 million children are in various types of swimming lessons across the country.

We are an approximately \$9 million organization. About two-thirds of that comes from government sources. Because we are relatively well funded in comparison with some smaller sports, I'd like to recognize that we've been able to implement some safe sport practices, projects, programs and systems that many other NSOs might not be able to. We feel that we've done many things well, but like all sports, we need to look in the mirror and see where we can do better.

When I started there, there was a lack of women in leadership positions and a lack of human resources in general. We've grown from 10 staff to 50 staff. The majority of our employees are women, including multiple senior managers and one of our senior directors. Four of our nine board members are women, including our current president and our past president. With the assistance of the Canadian Olympic Committee, the Canadian Paralympic Committee and the Government of Canada, we have developed a safe sport system focusing on education, prevention and response.

We consulted heavily with our friends at USA Swimming, who had a head start on us. They were glad to share tools and resources with us. Our provincial sections and the Canadian Swimming Coaches Association all worked with us to navigate a very complex jurisdictional challenge, lack of available funds and resources, and, specifically, complex case management.

In 2016 we began to roll out a national program that addressed issues, complaints and allegations via an independent safe sport officer. We strengthened our response by signing on with OSIC. Our existing program will remain in place as our OSIC partnership grows in areas that they may not cover. We want all participants to have a safe place to come forward in a safe environment during the most difficult of situations.

OSIC is a key building block for the sport community to continue strengthening the safety of all participants. It will take time for everyone to understand OSIC's role and to start to see the positive effects. It will need to be supported all the way down to the grassroots level. Everyone in our sport is committed to ensuring a healthy and positive environment and to maintaining a safe and inclusive culture for all.

Once again, thank you for your important work with this committee. We welcome any questions you may have as we work together to make sport as safe as possible.

• (1710)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Thank you to everyone for your testimony.

We'll now go to our first round of questions, with six minutes for each party.

We'll start with Anna Roberts for six minutes.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a couple of questions I'd like to address to Ahmed.

Were you the director of Water Polo Canada at some point?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** Previously, I was the director of Water Polo Canada.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** What year would that have been?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** That would have been 2005 to 2013.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Were you aware of the abuse by Dan Berthelette, Pat Oaten and Guy Baker, and what they had committed under your employment?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** Let me go through those three. Some of the issues with Dan Berthelette predated my start there. Patrick Oaten was there during my time. We did not receive complaints or allegations against him during my time there. Guy Baker came on near the end of my term at Water Polo Canada, and was dealt with by another CEO.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Are you named in this lawsuit?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** I am not.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** You are not aware of any allegations against you or the situation that occurred while you were the CEO at Water Polo Canada.

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** No.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** They were under your employment. Is that correct?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** I'm sorry. I....

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Were they under your employment during your time at Water Polo Canada? Answer yes or no.

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** All three were.

Guy Baker was in my final year. Patrick Oaten—

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** You were aware of them.

Here's my next question. The plaintiffs are Sophie Baron La Salle, Katrina Monton, Stephanie Valin and other athletes who weren't named because of their fear of repercussions.

Were you aware of these allegations? Were they brought to your attention?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** They were not. No.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** They were never brought to your attention between.... From what I understand, they were on the team from 2004 to 2016.

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** I left in 2013, so I know those athletes, but they did not raise those allegations.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** The lawsuit has nothing to do with you.

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** No.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Can I ask you, with the situation of these athletes coming forward, what could you have done as the CEO of Water Polo Canada to ensure that this doesn't continue in Swimming Canada?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** To answer that, I think the steps we've taken at Swimming Canada are to provide an avenue for athletes to come forward to our independent officer.

To be clear, with our independent officer and some lessons that we've learned, our independent officer can execute policy without the consent of the board or executive management. They listen to allegations and complaints, and can invoke policy directly without having to come to the organization directly.

• (1715)

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** I'm sorry. My time is limited, and I want to get to a very important part.

In a toxic environment like those we've heard of from many athletes, what would you say are the proper procedures to put in place to ensure the safety of all of the athletes under your jurisdiction?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** Aside from education and prevention, which are both key elements, in terms of a response, it's having a place for athletes to be able to come and feel comfortable, feel safe and be able to speak and report. It's having policies, whether they're on investigations or disciplinary matters, and mental health services in a safe environment.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Can I also ask how much money you receive from the Government of Canada on an annual basis?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** Swimming Canada receives roughly between \$6 million and \$7 million. However, many of those funds are heavily restricted to high performance and the high-performance program for events.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** These funds have never been frozen, as far as you're concerned. The government's never come to you and frozen any of these funds.

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** No.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** If the athlete is not a high-performing athlete, do you lose money?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** That's not necessarily how it works. Funding is based on programs—

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** You just said that it's for high-performance athletes.

I apologize. I don't understand.

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** [*Inaudible—Editor*] the high-performance program.

The program is funded through recommendations and through presentations on the podium, and that money is then recommended to the Government of Canada.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We're now going to turn to Sonia Sidhu online.

Sonia, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses for your testimony and for sharing your lived experience. It is heartbreaking. I want to thank you for your bravery and for adding to your important work so that we can all build a safer sports environment in Canada for women and girls.

My first question is for Ms. Proske from AthletesCAN. You spoke about having a moral compass and Olympic dreams. We want both to be a reality.

How does AthletesCAN support athletes who have come forward with complaints of misconduct in sport, and what resources are provided?

**Ms. Andrea Proske:** At AthletesCAN, our job is to amplify. For those who may not be aware, AthletesCAN is an independent non-profit. We are run by athletes, for athletes. We represent the 64 national teams. We just see our job as being a unified place to amplify that.

We have had a hand in doing pulse checks with our athletes for a long time. In 2019, we ran a safe sport summit.

My apologies for referencing my notes; I do have a bit of a Swiss cheese brain.

We passed the seven key consensus findings on to Sport Canada. That resulted in a provincial and federal summit. Eventually it went down the line to the UCCMS and OSIC. We did a pulse check last year as well.

We're really excited. I see our job as directing people to the many resources that there are and making sure there are no gaps. We're working on an athlete hub as well, to have a one-stop shop because athletes should be focused on their important work, which is being heads-down and being the best athlete that they possibly can be. It shouldn't be their job to be on top of all of the minutia of governmental and policy change.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** As a follow-up, you talked about OSIC services and funding accountability.

Do you believe that OSIC is an essential mechanism for athletes? How does it force national sport organizations to adopt...?

• (1720)

**Ms. Andrea Proske:** As someone who made a career out of being first at the finish line, I'm eager for this to be fully developed to where I know it can be. It's only six months old. I'm really excited to see what will happen when everyone signs on in April.

I do wish that we had these services a long time ago. I know that it's not perfect. I would love to see OSIC's powers expanded at the provincial and local levels. I think it's far from perfect at the moment.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Thank you.

My next questions are for Ms. O'Neill from the Canadian Paralympic Committee.

You talked about safe and inclusive sport. Can you describe your approach to working with and supporting athletes who have disabilities? How does this impact their experiences in sport?

**Ms. Karen O'Neill:** Sure.

I'll start off and then perhaps ask Erica to give an athlete's perspective.

I would say that we see a fundamental, strong link between diversity and inclusion and safe sport. If you are able to address what a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment looks like, then you will probably reduce your chances of harm and maltreatment. We believe that they're inextricably linked.

As a games organization, we organize and support, on behalf of Canada, the Canadian Paralympic team for three sets of games every four years. These are the Parapan team, the summer Paralympic team and the winter Paralympic team.

From an organizational standpoint, we would be scrubbing down on all the details during a games period of, for instance, how athletes are prepared through our sport members and in partnership with our sport members before they even go to the games. That's especially for those where it might be their first time heading to the games and their first games experience.

In the village, there are built-in support structures to ensure that the sport managers, athletes and sport-specific teams are well taken care of and that they have a response mechanism should anything be required immediately. Also, at a very fundamental level, even with the number of people, there's room allocation and linkage with the staff.

Erica can perhaps comment from an athlete's perspective and experience.

**Ms. Erica Gavel (Ph.D. candidate and Vice-Chair, Canadian Paralympic Committee Athlete Council, Canadian Paralympic Committee):** I'm very much in agreement with Karen's comments.

I think one of the biggest differences when you're comparing able-bodied athletes with para athletes is just understanding that there really is a disability component.

People end up in sport, and para sport in particular, through different avenues. I'm going to assume that someone with a congenital disability is going to have a different sport upbringing, perhaps, than someone with an impairment acquired later on in life.

From an athlete's perspective—I'm just speaking from my own perspective right now—a safe and inclusive environment just allows the athlete to feel comfortable being who they truly are.

I just think that para sport is so dynamic. Even from the coaching aspect, everything is very different from able-bodied....

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Thank you.

How can we make sure that access to inclusive mental health professionals for athletes can be expanded? What do athletes need, especially athletes living with disabilities—or any athlete who needs those services? How can we expand access to them?

**The Chair:** Give a very quick, short answer, please.

**Ms. Karen O'Neill:** I'm going to ask Michelle to respond to that question, particularly on the mental health support services available.

**Ms. Michelle Killins (Director, Paralympic Performance and Pathways, Canadian Paralympic Committee):** Thank you for that.

We do have a mental health lead within our organization because we recognize that there are quite a few gaps in our para population's ability to access mental health services. We don't know all of the reasons why. We're actually looking into developing some research and talking to our athletes to better understand what some of the gaps are to accessing mental health services so that we can better create programming for them.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We're now going to turn it over to Andréanne Larouche.

Andréanne, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank Ms. Proske, Ms. O'Neill, Ms. Killins, Ms. Gravel and Mr. El-Awadi for their testimony today, which complements our important study on women in sport.

Ms. Proske, can you explain where your funding comes from?

• (1725)

[English]

**Ms. Andrea Proske:** We are funded through Sport Canada, but we are a completely independent organization.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** So your funding comes from Sport Canada.

[English]

**Ms. Andrea Proske:** That's correct.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Okay.

I'll now turn to Mr. El-Awadi from Swimming Canada.

Mr. El-Awadi, how much does it cost you annually to be part of the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner, or OSIC, program? Also, what does the agreement cover?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** I'm sorry, but I can't hear the interpretation.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** How much does it cost you annually to be covered by the OSIC?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** For us, at the national level, it's about \$20,000. The amount increases as you include the provincial and municipal levels.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Can you go back over what this agreement with the OSIC covers?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** It includes all volunteers, athletes, staff, and coaches associated with our national team, from entry to the Olympic and Paralympic levels.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Where does Swimming Canada's funding come from?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** We receive about \$6 million from governments. Most of the money comes from the federal government, but the provincial governments also contribute, depending on the event. It's mostly registrations and other revenue generated through corporate partnerships.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Okay.

My next question is for Ms. Proske from AthletesCAN, or Mr. El-Awadi from Swimming Canada.

Since 2018, national sport organizations have been required to report cases of abuse to Sport Canada. How many cases have you reported to Sport Canada since 2018, and who did you share the information with?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** We've reported about 15 cases since 2018. We provided the information directly to the person who was assigned to our organization by Sport Canada. Reports must be made based on when a formal complaint was received or a formal process was initiated.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Okay.

I'd like Ms. Proske to answer the same question.

How many cases of abuse have you reported to Sport Canada, and who did you share the information with?

[English]

**Ms. Andrea Proske:** I don't have any numbers for you. I wish I did.

Our role is to help guide athletes to the proper resources. We do also work, I believe, with the Western University Sports Solution Clinic, which offers legal counsel if they are going into an appeals process, but we don't handle safe sports issues.

• (1730)

[Translation]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** How much does it cost to be part of the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner?

[English]

**Ms. Andrea Proske:** Again, it's another great question I don't have information for, but I can find out for you.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Okay. That's great.

To conclude, I'd like to ask Mr. El-Awadi a quick question.

Mr. El-Awadi, in answering your questions, you mentioned people from Sport Canada assigned to your organization.

Who is the person assigned to Swimming Canada?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** I don't have the name with me, but I think his first name was Rafael. I would have to check the list. Our operations department manages this process with Sport Canada.

[English]

**The Chair:** Wonderful. Thank you so much.

We're now going to pass it over to Leah Gazan.

Leah, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you so much, Chair.

Just as a follow up to Adr anne Larouche's question, if you could submit that information to the committee, that would be very helpful.

My first question is for Mr. El-Jawadi with Swimming Canada. Is that right?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** El-Awadi.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** El-Awadi. Sorry.

I'm looking at a news article of July 24, 2012. Were you the executive director at the time Guy Baker was hired? Were you the executive director?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** I was. Yes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you for confirming that.

You're quoted as saying:

'Guy is one of the most widely respected coaches in water polo,' said El-Awadi from WPC's head office in Ottawa. 'There is no other coach on the planet who has had more success in the women's game and we're absolutely thrilled that he's on board to lead our program into the next Olympic Games.'

In 2022 the lawsuit came out, a \$5.5 million lawsuit by Dani le Sauvageau. This is what the article says:

The lawsuit also outlines critiques of some national team support staff. Valin allegedly went to WPC support staff member Daniele Sauvageau in 2013 about Guy Baker's bullying and outbursts, expressing her fear of working with him.

You said he was the best coach ever. I'm wondering what standards in terms of hiring practices and oversight are used when you say this is the best coach ever. I have used the practices used in teaching a number of times. For example, all educators in Manitoba have to pass a child abuse registry check. What I'm finding with this is that people just have to have good technical expertise.

Outside of good technical expertise, what kind of characteristics did he have to show to demonstrate he's the best coach ever?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** I'm not going to speak past 2013. I was not with the organization anymore. During that hiring process—

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** No, but you were there to hire him—

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** Yes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** —and he ended up being another abusive coach. So when you hired him, what standards were in place to say he is the best coach ever?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** Guy underwent an extensive hiring process. We had partners at the table. We did reference checks. He came from the NCAA and USA Swimming, and with both he had an extensive, long career of over 20 years.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Could you submit to the committee the formal process used for hiring? I have a limited amount of time, and I think that would be helpful.

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** I wouldn't have—

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I'm not getting a clear understanding of the hiring process verbally, and I don't have much more time, so if you could submit that to the committee, that would be great.

• (1735)

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** I understand that, but I wouldn't have access to Water Polo Canada's documents from 2012, so I wouldn't want to commit.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Okay, that's fine. I'm sure we'll find another way.

I'll move on to another question for you.

There have been a lot of criticisms about NSOs and NSOs' failure in many cases to participate in thorough investigations, and, because of this, abuse continues. One thing that victims are calling for is a judicial inquiry. Do you support a judicial inquiry?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** I do. I would support that and other forms of audits that would help augment the system as well as make it a safer place.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you very much for that.

When you say other kinds of audits, what would they include?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** Cultural audits are an example. Safe sport audits are another example, so all those.... Very similar to what we're required to do with financial audits, those other types of audits would be able to shed light on strengths and weaknesses and areas for improvement across the board.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** The former sports minister called for a judicial inquiry, and I think, from the testimony we've heard so far, those calls are growing both from victims and sports organizations or federations. As the executive director, would you be open to participating in a judicial inquiry, should that occur?

**Mr. Ahmed El-Awadi:** Yes, absolutely.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Okay, perfect.

How long do I have?

**The Chair:** Well, I was going to wrap you up.

You're all done, okay?

I wasn't going to let you get me this time, Leah.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Okay, I saw a hand, but I didn't know if it was a hand or the hand.

**The Chair:** Leah knows me; she knows how to work me.

We're going to pass it over for the....

This is where you guys can all say, "Karen, we have nine minutes" so we're going to go three, three, one and a half and one and a half, okay? I like to use every minute of the time.

Dominique, you have three minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Good evening, everyone. I'll be brief because my time is limited.

My question is for Andrea Proske.

Good evening, Ms. Proske. You explained that as an athlete, it was very exciting but your journey was difficult given the abuse you and your fellow athletes experienced.

To use my colleague Ms. Ferreri's words, what processes could have been put in place to protect you?

[*English*]

**Ms. Andrea Proske:** Thank you very much.

I know we have no time, so I'll fly through this.

I didn't want to go nuclear and go straight to an appeals process. When I realized it, I tried to go through all the processes I could, which was talking to my support staff and talking to my mental health professional. None of those were able to get me to where I needed to be. When I saw other teammates going through the appeals process, or when I—

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** As I understand it, you had talked to them; people knew about it.

[*English*]

**Ms. Andrea Proske:** Sorry, one more time, repeat the question. I know we have....

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Did you talk to these people? Did you inform them of the situation?

[*English*]

**Ms. Andrea Proske:** Yes, I talked to them. I talked to my mental health professional, and I was told at the time that any complaint I had would go straight to my abuser. I'm embarrassed to say that's why I feel this moral compass versus Olympic dream was so difficult for me. I had to choose which I wanted more. In a way, it there was almost an ownership to that, because I wasn't going to let him decide how far I got in sport. Unfortunately, not every one of my teammates had the same experience.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** It's terrible to hear you say that you would have had to go nuclear. What does that mean to you? As I understand it, you probably would have had to give up your sport.

[*English*]

**Ms. Andrea Proske:** I strongly believe that, if Dave Thompson hadn't been let go, I never would have made it to the Olympics, period, end of sentence.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Ms. Proske, you talked about restorative justice. You've given us some possible solutions. What do you mean by "restorative justice"? How do you see that? How do you think we should move forward?

● (1740)

[*English*]

**Ms. Andrea Proske:** What it means is not making athletes take the stand unless absolutely necessary—not retraumatizing them. I also think we need to allow for an infrastructure that is whole to thrive, as well. It's not just about bad actors; it's about the NSO that supported them.

In the same breath, it's also about the good actors, like my coach. While I flew home with a gold medal, she flew home with no job. NSOs were given an opportunity to build on a culture that was creating positive change and happy, healthy athletes. Ninety-five per cent of C-suite women come from a background in sport. We're not just building medals, here. We're building something bigger.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

I want everybody to know that my timer has run out. My battery is dead.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** I know—that's good for you guys, right? You can use whatever time you like.

Yasir, I'm going to now pass the floor over to you for three minutes.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Let me start by thanking Andrea for being here.

Your valiant effort in the work you're doing is making lives better for other athletes, especially female athletes. Thank you. This is really important work and we're all listening to you.

You set out some recommendations in your presentation. The one that caught my attention is around bystander training. Can you expand on what education you think is necessary, and how OSIC can play a role in that important education?

**Ms. Andrea Proske:** That's a great question.

I think there are a couple of different levels to go to, with this.

One is that OSIC, right now, is limited in its scope of high-performance, elite training. I would love to see a world where we start from the grassroots up. It is so important that these younger athletes who are indoctrinated.... I got into this as a 27-year-old—a full, adult person—and I still had issues with it. I worry about those athletes who are younger.

I also worry about the support staff around me. There's the heart-breaking story of a health staff member who was able to get up, leave and go. She knew something was wrong, but she couldn't put the words to it and didn't have a pathway to say what was wrong. Bystander training on what grooming is would be incredibly important. It's important to recognize it and have that verbiage.

I can see it now. I wish I hadn't had to go through what I did, in order to see this.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Are there models out there, in North America or beyond, that you can point to and say, “That's a good model, when it comes to bystander training, and that's something Canada should look at and replicate”?

**Ms. Andrea Proske:** I'd have to think about the bystander training ones.

I will say there are some really interesting adjacent things. Norway has a system where it's the pleasure of participation. Higher attendance in sport means higher talent, in the long run. When it comes to the registry, for example.... We have issues with privacy laws. I know that's an interesting topic. I believe the Netherlands has a call-in system. It's not public, but you can still access that information.

That's the surface-level information I know about, but there are a lot of other organizations similar to Athletes Canada in the world that we could lean on and tap into.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** That's great. Thank you.

Madam Chair, do I have any time left?

**The Chair:** You have 38 seconds.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Oh, I have 38 seconds.

Can I ask Karen O'Neill the same question on bystander training and what role she thinks OSIC can play in such training?

**Ms. Karen O'Neill:** Thanks very much for the question.

I could go well beyond OSIC, because OSIC has a particular focus to get up and running, right now. All of us need to support it as much as possible and kick-start its initial role.

I think the collective—the federal or provincial governments and national organizations—can also build on some of the other items Ahmed spoke to earlier, particularly around education, prevention and bystander training.

I would also say—Erica referred to it a bit earlier—that even having the confidence or a voice to name the behaviour.... Often-times, and particularly from a Paralympic athlete standpoint, the

desire to participate overrides the desire to call out behaviour and then not belong.

I think there are a number of different areas to look at, even before bystander training.

Thank you.

• (1745)

**The Chair:** Awesome. Thank you so much.

We have 90 seconds for Andréanne Larouche.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My next question will be for Ms. O'Neill and Ms. Gavel from the Canadian Paralympic Committee.

Were athletes who won gold, silver or bronze medals awarded funding?

[*English*]

**Ms. Karen O'Neill:** Thank you very much for asking the question.

Currently, there is no performance funding available for medals. What we have done is.... While we were in Beijing, this topic really came to a head, I would say, and we made a commitment with our partners to be able to initiate performance funding, starting in Paris after the Paralympic Games of Paris in 2024.

The issue on this hand was that there was an inequitable representation for performance. You have the Olympic athletes, who are receiving, for bronze, silver and gold, \$10,000, \$15,000 and \$20,000, and there are no funds at all to honour or reflect the performance of Paralympic athletes. The goal is to provide an equitable acknowledgement of performance.

Thank you for asking.

**The Chair:** You have—

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** It's a great inequity. The minister is committed to changing this.

I hope that work will be done to resolve this inequity in sport, just as I hope that an independent investigation will be carried out to clarify cases where there are doubts about funding and potential conflicts of interest that this could imply and, above all, that there will be—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Oh, oh! Andréanne....

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** I'm not done, Madam Chair. There's a lot more to do.

That's what I had to say.

[English]

**The Chair:** Well, you know, if we speak faster, we get a lot in, right? I get that. That's the way I roll, too.

Leah, you have 90 seconds.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

My question is for Madam Killins.

Currently, you are not a signatory of the Abuse-free sport program. Is that correct?

**Ms. Michelle Killins:** I'll pass this to Karen.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Ms. O'Neill, sorry.

**Ms. Karen O'Neill:** That's okay.

I'm Karen O'Neill with the Canadian Paralympic Committee.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Sorry.

**Ms. Karen O'Neill:** No, no, it's absolutely fine.

As an organization, there are three gateways to go through. The first one is the adoption and support of the UCCMS, which we have done. The second one is the integration into our policy suite of the elements of the code that prohibit any form of abuse or maltreatment. That is done. The third and outstanding gate for us to pass through is that all of those engaged within our organization have

signed the waiver. The waiver basically puts you in the system and the accountability structure of OSIC.

We signed on probably.... Well, we have a three-month window. We've completed the first two tranches, and we are just completing the third and final, so we're still well within the timeline. There is absolutely no question about supporting the principle. It's the mechanics of being able to work it through for this third and final gateway.

**The Chair:** We have seven seconds left. I'm stealing them from you.

On behalf of all the members here, I'd really like to thank all of you for coming and testifying in front of us. Today is one of our last days of taking testimony so that we'll be able to get to an extremely important report. Thank you very much.

Just as a reminder, if there are any questions, comments or concerns, please feel free to contact the chair or the clerk if there's anything we can do.

We'll be meeting once again on Monday. It's a change of schedule, but Danielle and I are working on it. We'll let you know as soon as possible.

Thanks. The meeting is adjourned.

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