



TO: USA Swimming Board of Directors

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SUBJECT: Updated Safe Sport Action Plan

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The USA Swimming Executive Committee met on June 30 in Indianapolis. At this meeting, committee members were presented with and endorsed an updated Safe Sport action plan. This updated action plan represents a significant shift in our strategy to date, and is a result of several months of work by our staff after listening to our volunteer leaders and collaborating with the public relations/communications firm that is supporting us.

We recognize that some of the issues we face today are an increasing unfortunate fact of life for all youth-serving organizations and that our evolving role and responsibilities related to inappropriate conduct by our members is permanently with us. One of our core cultural values is *"to be open to questions and have a willingness to change,"* and addressing these issues has put that value to the test and strengthened our commitment to it.

While we will continue our current media relations strategy of working with legitimate media sources and not engaging with personal bloggers, our strategy moving forward will have the ultimate goal of improving the overall perceptions of USA Swimming's Safe Sport Program efforts.

The elements of this updated strategy have been carefully considered, and we are pleased to have the Executive Committee's unanimous endorsement. Work on these elements will begin immediately. Following is a brief summary of the six elements of the action plan.

1. COMMISSION INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF OUR SAFE SPORT PROGRAM:

While we believe that our Safe Sport program is a model for other sports and we are proud of the progress we have made, we acknowledge that there is always room for

improvement. Therefore, we will engage a reputable and independent entity to undertake a thorough review of our entire Safe Sport Program and provide a report back to us that will evaluate our program against the best practices of other organizations, as well as make recommendations for how USA Swimming's program might be improved. This review will help USA Swimming gain greater public trust with our membership, the media, and the general public. This is a big project, and it will take some time for it to be completed, but we can immediately begin talking about our plans to commission this work.

## 2. SHOW OUR FACE:

For the past three years our strategy has been to decline the majority of interviews related to sexual misconduct cases and issue written statements instead. The issues we are dealing with are extremely sensitive and complex, yet we want to humanize our approach. As outlined in our rulebook, USA Swimming cannot provide details specific to an investigation while it is ongoing, but we will provide details about the process and use a spokesperson to do so. To accomplish this we are going to put USA Swimming's Executive Director and Director of Safe Sport through an intensive media training program, after which they will then be made available to legitimate sport-specific and general interest media for interviews as issues and topics arise. Your Executive Director will also be starting a blog that will be promoted via USA Swimming's website. This blog will provide an opportunity to write about a wide range of topics, not just Safe Sport, that impact our NGB and our sport. We will also be using social media (Twitter, etc.) as platforms to further a more personal approach to issues.

## 3. ENGAGE IN THE PUBLIC CONVERSATION:

We recognize that to "Show Our Face" we must be able to share strong messages. We are all familiar with the three objectives that form the basis for USA Swimming's Business Plan: *BUILD, PROMOTE & ACHIEVE*. As a starting point to our Safe Sport action plan, we are simplifying the Safe Sport messaging with the mantra of: *EDUCATE, PREVENT & PROTECT*. Just as we can talk about the strategies and programs that comprise the three objectives of our Business Plan, we will now be able to do likewise with the three objectives of our Safe Sport Program.

The second issue we need to address in our public conversation is how USA Swimming is handling old cases. We need to help the media and others understand the obstacles we face when dealing with inappropriate conduct that occurred before USA Swimming even existed, or before someone became a member. We must also help people understand the huge gap between rumors/gossip and facts/first-hand information. At times we have been held to a higher standard than law enforcement, and we need to give people the opportunity to better understand how the system works and what is required for us to take action against an alleged abuser.

And finally, we intend to start talking about the need for an independent third-party (à la USADA) to be established as a service to all youth sports to receive, process, investigate and adjudicate complaints related to sexual abuse. We do not think such a third-party entity

should be formed or funded by the USOC as there are many youth sports organizations outside the USOC's purview that ought to be part of this initiative. The establishment of this entity will also eliminate "the fox is guarding the henhouse" argument that has been expressed by some. We envision much greater awareness and trust resulting from our effectively engaging in the public conversation about the difficult and sensitive issues of sexual misconduct and abuse.

4. CLOSE LEGISLATIVE LOOPHOLES:

USA Swimming has made tremendous strides with its Code of Conduct, but there are still loopholes that need to be closed. For example, if a member committed sexual misconduct against a minor before he/she joined USA Swimming, but no charges were pressed, we do not have a way to remove that member. Another example: if a member committed sexual misconduct against a minor who is not a member of USA Swimming, but no charges were pressed, and it was reported to us, we do not have a way to remove that member. Mike Unger is going to lead the effort to get legislation brought forward to address these issues at the upcoming USAS Convention. There are also other issues that need to be addressed (such as background checks and screens for coach-owned clubs), but these are more complex and we'll need time to determine how best to address them.

5. EXPEDITE THE NATIONAL BOARD OF REVIEW PROCESS:

Few things are more frustrating to those involved in the reporting process than the time it takes to conduct investigations and bring cases before a National Board of Review (NBOR). We will work with BryanCave, investigators and the NBOR Chair to determine what can be done to speed-up all aspects of the process.

6. PROVIDE ADDITIONAL PUBLIC & MEDIA RELATIONS RESOURCES TO CLUBS AND LSCs WHEN LOCAL ISSUES ARISE:

We recognize that often times when an issue of sexual misconduct arises, there is a flare-up of local media attention. While we have been able to work with some clubs on their communications strategy, we want to make sure all USA Swimming clubs and LSCs are aware of the resources we can provide when a sensitive situation arises. Going forward, we will provide clubs and LSCs with direct public relations and crisis communication resources from our partner, Ground Floor Media. When finding themselves in a flare-up situation, Clubs and LSCs will be able to contact Karen Linhart at USA Swimming and she will coordinate getting them the needed support to help with the messaging to members, media and others.

There is a financial impact to this plan. By far, the most expensive piece will be the independent review, yet we are confident that it will be worth the cost in order to be able to improve our program and help victims of abuse. There will also be costs for media training and other PR and communications aspects of the overall plan. In total, we estimate the expenses could run between \$100K and \$200K. It's still early in the quad and we're

hoping to be able to find the funds to cover the necessary expenses from the Executive and Business Development budgets.

Our work on all six of these elements will begin immediately. It is, however, unrealistic to expect immediate results, and measuring success will be difficult in the short-term. However, we believe these steps are appropriate and necessary at this time and that they will ultimately help USA Swimming establish a much more balanced public discussion about this very serious issue.

Thank you.