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Accessible Version

June 5, 2025

Congressional Committees

## **Amateur Athlete Safety: Certification Related to the Independence of the U.S. Center for SafeSport for Fiscal Year 2024**

The U.S. Center for SafeSport (the Center), established in 2017, is a nonprofit organization that plays a key role in ensuring the safety of amateur athletes. Many of these athletes are minors who participate in Olympic, Paralympic, Pan-American, and Parapan American events and training.<sup>1</sup> The Center has jurisdiction over the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee (the Corporation) and national governing bodies (amateur sports organizations recognized or certified by the Corporation for a sport included in the Olympic, Paralympic, Pan-American, or Parapan American Games) with regard to safeguarding amateur athletes against abuse in sports.<sup>2</sup>

The Center is required to develop training, policies, and procedures to prevent abuse of amateur athletes, among other activities. Also, the Center is responsible for investigating and resolving allegations of sexual misconduct by coaches, trainers, managers, peers, and others in violation of the Center's policies and procedures. In addition, the Center may, at its discretion, investigate and resolve allegations of other policy violations, including nonsexual child abuse as well as emotional and physical misconduct.<sup>3</sup>

The Empowering Olympic, Paralympic, and Amateur Athletes Act of 2020 (EOPAAA) made several amendments to the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act.<sup>4</sup> Among other things, the EOPAAA prohibits former employees or board members of the Corporation or a

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<sup>1</sup>Under the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act, an amateur sports organization means a not-for-profit corporation, association, or other group organized in the United States that sponsors or arranges an amateur athletic competition. 36 U.S.C. § 220501(b)(3). An amateur athlete is an athlete who meets the eligibility standards established by the national governing body or Paralympic sports organization for the sport in which the athlete competes. The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee (Corporation) recognizes or certifies one national governing body per sport (e.g., USA Archery, USA Boxing). In this report, we use the term national governing body to include the Corporation's 51 recognized or certified national governing bodies and Paralympic sports organizations the Center reported to us in January 2025. In addition, nine sports internally managed by the Corporation are not included in our count of national governing bodies.

<sup>2</sup>See 36 U.S.C. §§ 220541-220543.

<sup>3</sup>For more information on the Center's response and resolution process for reports of abuse, see GAO, *Amateur Athletes: The U.S. Center for SafeSport's Response and Resolution Process for Reporting Abuse*, [GAO-21-128R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 18, 2020).

<sup>4</sup>Pub. L. No. 116-189, 134 Stat. 943. The EOPAAA was enacted on October 30, 2020.

national governing body from working or volunteering at the Center for 2 years after their departure.<sup>5</sup> The EOPAAA also provides that an executive or attorney for the Center shall be considered to have an inappropriate conflict of interest if the executive or attorney also represents the Corporation or a national governing body.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the act prohibits the Corporation and the national governing bodies from interfering in or attempting to influence the outcome of an investigation.<sup>7</sup>

The EOPAAA includes a provision for GAO to annually “make available to the public a certification relating to the Center’s independence from the Corporation,” including findings of whether:<sup>8</sup>

- a violation of the prohibition on employment of former employees or board members of the Corporation has occurred during the year preceding the certification;
- an executive or attorney for the Center has had an inappropriate conflict of interest during that year; and
- the Corporation has interfered in, or attempted to influence the outcome of, an investigation by the Center.

For our fifth annual report, we examined, during the period of January 1, 2024, through December 31, 2024: (1) whether former board members or employees of the Corporation observed the required 2-year cooling-off period before working or volunteering at the Center; (2) whether an executive or attorney for the Center had an inappropriate conflict of interest, as defined by the EOPAAA<sup>9</sup>; and (3) whether the Corporation interfered in, or attempted to influence the outcome of, an investigation by the Center.

Our certification applies to the Corporation.<sup>10</sup> However, we also include information about national governing bodies in our report because the EOPAAA refers to national governing bodies as well as the Corporation in connection with the cooling-off period, the definition of an

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<sup>5</sup>Section 8(a)(1)(E) of the EOPAAA (codified at 36 U.S.C. § 220541(f)(1)) provides that “[a] former employee or board member of the corporation or a national governing body shall not work or volunteer at the Center during the 2-year period beginning on the date on which the former employee or board member ceases employment with the corporation or national governing body.” However, an athlete serving on the board of directors of a national governing body who is not otherwise employed by the national governing body may volunteer at, or serve in an advisory capacity to, the Center. For the purposes of this report, we refer to this as the 2-year cooling-off period.

<sup>6</sup>Section 8(a)(1)(E) of the EOPAAA (codified at 36 U.S.C. § 220541(f)(3)).

<sup>7</sup>Section 8(a)(1)(E) of the EOPAAA (codified at 36 U.S.C. § 220541(f)(4)(A)) provides that the “corporation and the national governing bodies shall not interfere in, or attempt to influence the outcome of, an investigation.”

<sup>8</sup>See section 8(a)(1)(E) of the EOPAAA (codified at 36 U.S.C. § 220541(j)). For our fiscal year 2023 certification, see GAO, *Amateur Athlete Safety: Certification Related to the Independence of the U.S. Center for SafeSport for Fiscal Year 2023*, [GAO-24-107252](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 13, 2024).

<sup>9</sup>An executive or attorney for the Center shall be considered to have an inappropriate conflict of interest if the executive or attorney also represents the Corporation or a national governing body. Section 8(a)(1)(E) of the EOPAAA (codified at 36 U.S.C. § 220541(f)(3)).

<sup>10</sup>See 36 U.S.C. § 220541(j).

inappropriate conflict of interest, and the prohibition on interference with Center investigations.<sup>11</sup> The scope of our work did not include examining the background or suitability of Center employees.

Our findings in this report are based on our review of information and documents that we obtained from the Center, the Corporation, and national governing bodies.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, to examine whether the cooling-off period was observed and whether inappropriate conflicts of interest occurred, we reviewed information provided by the Center about its employees and volunteers (including board members, executives, attorneys, contractors, and other staff) who worked or volunteered for the Center at any point during its fiscal year 2024 (January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024).<sup>13</sup> We reviewed conflict-of-interest verification forms and associated supplemental statements that the Center requires of all its employees (150 forms), board and committee members (13), contractors (51), and outside counsel (29).<sup>14</sup> The form requires disclosure of any current or past employment or association with the Corporation or a national governing body.

We also cross-checked the information provided by the Center with information we received from the Corporation and 45 of 51 national governing bodies about their employees. For example, we obtained from the Corporation and national governing bodies information about attorneys they employed, hired, or retained, including the dates of representation, among other things.

We also received information from the Corporation and national governing bodies about whether, to their knowledge, former employees, including board members, executives, attorneys, employees of contractors, and volunteers, subsequently became involved with the Center after leaving their organizations. We collected this information by written response from the Corporation. We gathered the information from national governing bodies through a written response or a web survey response. We collected written responses from four national governing bodies that had more than 25 attorneys or outside counsel to ease respondent burden. We gathered information from the remaining national governing bodies using the web survey. Officials from three national governing bodies volunteered to preview the survey and provide feedback on the questions and usability of the survey. We made minor revisions in response to their feedback. We fielded the survey from February 2025 to March 2025. We received 41 completed web surveys plus the four written responses for a total of 45 responding national governing bodies, for an 88 percent response rate.

To examine whether the Corporation or national governing bodies interfered in, or attempted to influence the outcome of, an investigation, we reviewed the Center's written responses to

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<sup>11</sup>An executive or attorney for the Center shall be considered to have an inappropriate conflict of interest if the executive or attorney also represents the Corporation or a national governing body. Section 8(a)(1)(E) of the EOPAAA (codified at 36 U.S.C. § 220541(f)(3)).

<sup>12</sup>Our report covers the Center's fiscal year 2024 and is based on the certification provisions of the EOPAAA described above and our review of the information and documentation described below. This report does not address the Center's independence from the Corporation or national governing bodies in any other respects.

<sup>13</sup>An executive or attorney for the Center shall be considered to have an inappropriate conflict of interest if the executive or attorney also represents the Corporation or a national governing body. Section 8(a)(1)(E) of the EOPAAA (codified at 36 U.S.C. § 220541(f)(3)).

<sup>14</sup>Employees and others provide the information included in the conflict-of-interest forms; the information is self-disclosed.

questions about how employees, board members, or other representatives of the Corporation or national governing bodies interacted with the Center during its fiscal year 2024. We also reviewed various documents, such as the Center's employee handbook, confidentiality policy, and standard operating procedures. In addition, we reviewed the Center's SafeSport Code, which establishes acceptable standards of conduct for all individuals who participate in U.S. Olympic and Paralympic events and training.

We conducted this performance audit from December 2024 to June 2025 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

### **Certification**

Based on the certification provisions of the EOPAAA and the methodology described above, we certify that the Center was independent from the Corporation during its fiscal year 2024, as described in more detail below.

### **Observance of 2-Year Cooling-Off Period for Former Employees and Board Members**

We found no evidence that a former employee or board member of the Corporation worked for the Center in violation of the cooling-off period during its fiscal year 2024. Specifically, we compared the names of individuals who separated from the Corporation between January 1, 2022, and December 31, 2024, with those who worked with the Center during its fiscal year 2024. We found no evidence that any of these individuals from the Corporation worked with the Center during 2024.

The Center takes multiple steps to ensure its employees and other individuals who worked with the Center (e.g., board and committee members and outside counsel) are aware of and in compliance with the 2-year cooling-off period. For example, the Center requires employees and other individuals who work with the Center to complete a conflict-of-interest form. The form requires disclosure of any current or past employment or association with the Corporation or a national governing body.

The Center provided us with copies of conflict-of-interest forms for its employees and other individuals who worked with the Center during its fiscal year 2024. Our review of these forms found that no individuals reported having worked for the Corporation or a national governing body during the required 2-year cooling-off period. Likewise, our review of information provided by responding national governing bodies found that none reported having employed individuals who subsequently volunteered or worked for the Center during the required 2-year cooling-off period.

### **Executive or Attorney Conflicts of Interest**

We found no evidence of a conflict of interest, as defined by the EOPAAA, between the Center's executives or attorneys and the Corporation.<sup>15</sup> The Center employed 20 executives and attorneys and retained 29 attorneys as outside counsel from various law firms in 2024. No

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<sup>15</sup>An executive or attorney for the Center shall be considered to have an inappropriate conflict of interest if the executive or attorney also represents the Corporation or a national governing body. Section 8(a)(1)(E) of the EOPAAA (codified at 36 U.S.C. § 220541(f)(3)).

Center executives or attorneys reported representing the Corporation during the relevant period. In addition, we cross-checked the names of every attorney the Corporation employed or retained as outside counsel and did not find any who also represented the Center in its fiscal year 2024. Similarly, we cross-checked the names of every attorney the responding national governing bodies employed or retained as outside counsel and did not find any who represented the Center in its fiscal year 2024.

### **Center Safeguards to Prevent Interference or Influence in Investigations**

Our review of the Center's investigative process found no evidence of interference or influence by the Corporation. Center staff reported to us that they were not aware of any attempts by the Corporation to interfere in or influence the outcome of an investigation during the Center's fiscal year 2024. According to Center staff, the Center expects employees and board members to report to senior staff members within the Center any attempts to interfere in or influence the outcome of an investigation.<sup>16</sup>

The Center has safeguards in place to prevent the Corporation and national governing bodies from interfering in or influencing the outcome of investigations.<sup>17</sup> The SafeSport Code requires the Center to share only limited information about allegations and investigations with the Corporation and national governing bodies. For example, the Center may request basic information from the Corporation and national governing bodies when determining its jurisdiction over a case, such as the names and contact information of individuals and their membership status.

The Center may also notify the Corporation or national governing bodies with jurisdiction over individuals about any temporary measures it imposes, such as restrictions on an individual's eligibility to participate in a sport. Such notifications allow the Corporation or national governing bodies to enforce the temporary measures. Per its policies, the Center does not provide detailed information about investigations to the Corporation and national governing bodies. The SafeSport Code also includes language prohibiting the Corporation or national governing body employees, board members, and legal counsel from serving as advisors to individuals participating in the Center's processes.

In addition to sharing limited information about investigations with the Corporation and national governing bodies, the Center has taken additional steps to prevent the Corporation or national governing bodies from interfering in or influencing the outcome of investigations. According to Center staff, they have discussed with employees and board members the provisions of the EOPAAA, including the provision prohibiting the Corporation and national governing bodies from interfering in, or attempting to influence the outcome of, an investigation. Also, the Center revised its agreement with the Corporation in January 2023 to expand on how the Corporation

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<sup>16</sup>Under the EOPAAA, in the case of an attempt to interfere in, or influence the outcome of, an investigation, the Center is required to submit to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation and the House Committee on Energy and Commerce and Committee on the Judiciary a report describing the attempt, within 72 hours. Section 8(a)(1)(E) of the EOPAAA (codified at 36 U.S.C. § 220541(f)(4)(B)). The Center did not report any potential interference to these committees during fiscal year 2024, according to Center officials.

<sup>17</sup>Under the SafeSport Code, certain alleged violations fall under the Center's "exclusive jurisdiction" (including allegations of sexual misconduct and child sexual abuse, among others), and other alleged violations fall under its "discretionary jurisdiction" (including allegations of non-sexual child abuse and emotional and physical misconduct, among others). The Code prohibits national governing bodies from investigating or resolving allegations within the Center's exclusive jurisdiction. National governing bodies may investigate and resolve matters within the Center's discretionary jurisdiction unless the Center expressly elects to examine them.

and national governing bodies should cooperate with the Center. These changes included specific timeframes by which the Corporation and national governing bodies should respond to SafeSport requests.

The Center revised some of its standard operating procedures in 2024 and 2025, including procedures for determining if national governing body and Corporation conflicts of interest exist. In April 2025, Center officials stated that the Center had drafted a procedure titled “NGB [National Governing Body] Interference and USOPC [the Corporation] Non-Compliance Standard Operating Procedure,” which would be finalized in spring 2025. According to Center officials, this new procedure consolidates and clarifies existing policies.

Since December 2021, the SafeSport Code has stated that the Corporation and national governing bodies are prohibited from interfering in, attempting to interfere in, or influencing the outcome of the Center’s investigations. Additionally, the Center conducted trainings for the Corporation and national governing bodies on the issue of interference as well as for Center employees and board members on reporting attempts to influence an investigation. According to Center officials, the Center will continue to provide these interference trainings periodically in the future for both the Corporation and national governing bodies. They stated that the Center’s informational sessions could make national governing bodies aware of the laws they must follow, the Center’s reporting obligations, and examples of conduct that could potentially constitute interference.

### **Third Party Views**

We provided excerpts from a draft of this report to the Center for review and comment. The Center had no comments.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Center, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions, please contact me at [larink@gao.gov](mailto:larink@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Major contributors to this report were Andrea Dawson (Assistant Director), Kelsey Kreider (Analyst in Charge), Bailee Donahue, Jean McSween, and Aaron Olszewski.

**//SIGNED//**

Kathryn A. Larin, Director  
Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues

*List of Committees*

The Honorable Ted Cruz  
Chairman  
The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
United States Senate

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley  
Chairman  
The Honorable Richard J. Durbin  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate

The Honorable Brett Guthrie  
Chairman  
The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Jim Jordan  
Chairman  
The Honorable Jamie Raskin  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary  
House of Representatives