

To: LSC Athlete Representatives

We hope that most of you have read the letter distributed by the athletes who sit on USA Swimming's Board of Directors. If not, you can find the letter [here](#). We are writing to LSC athlete representatives to voice our extreme disappointment in the entire Board's response to the recent wave of media coverage about USA Swimming's history of sexual abuse. We understand the challenging political position that they are in, as members of a Board that is currently under tremendous scrutiny. We know that as an outsider, it can be far too easy to offer criticism, without having to weigh the consequences of being in an actual Board position.

That being said, this particular topic, at this particular time, demands that we do more. Athletes are not outsiders in this organization. We do not have to passively observe as our organization fails to act. We have repeatedly told you that your voice matters. We have repeatedly told you that you have the ability to usher in real change, to make USA Swimming your organization. Your Athlete Directors failed to wield this power, so we are asking for LSC athlete representatives to take ownership of this issue. We are not only empowered to speak out when faced with a failure of leadership, we have the duty to do so.

Furthermore, we want to avoid the temptation to speak "for athletes" without actually consulting athletes. We don't expect a singular opinion to represent how everybody feels, and we want to be respectful of everybody's perspective on such an important and sensitive topic.

Attached below is a letter addressed to USA Swimming's entire Board of Directors. Please let us know if you, or any other athletes in your LSC would be willing to sign the letter. If you do not agree with the sentiments of the letter, or feel for some reason you cannot sign it, please feel free to provide us with feedback. You should also reach out to your LSC General Chair, your Zone Directors, other members of USA Swimming's Board of Directors, or USA Swimming staff with questions or concerns.

Thank you,

Ceallach Gibbons
Russell Payne
Joe Gazzarato
Hopefully more AEC members

To: The Board of Directors

Almost two weeks ago, the Orange County Register [issued a blistering indictment](#) of USA Swimming's senior leadership. As we all know, the article contained a combination of old accusations, salient criticisms, egregious misrepresentations, questionable conclusions, but ultimately: a harsh dose of reality.

We are contesting this issue during a cultural moment that will not relent. We cannot turn a blind eye this time. We cannot, and *should* not try to weather this storm. We must accept that the reason this story was published, and the reason this story gained traction, is because historically we have not done enough to hold sexual abusers and their enablers accountable. This is not for a lack of opportunities in 2008,ⁱ 2010,^{iiiiiv} 2012^v, 2014,^{viii} and 2017.^{viii}

Many of these older news stories include the same frustrating blend of verified facts and questionable allegations that are in the OCR piece from February 16th, 2018. We are not demanding action because the OCR piece contained new information. It aired dirty laundry that numerous other news outlets have reported on for nearly a decade. We are demanding action because if this Board fails to act with urgency and purpose, one of two things will happen:

1. We will wait out this current storm of media coverage. Our clubs will have to address this issue with concerned parents. Our enrollment numbers will suffer. Our reputation will suffer, and we will repeat the entire process in 6 months, 12 months, or 18 months. There is always another news article. There is always another victim who gains the courage to come forward.
2. The USOC will demand the resignation of our entire Board.

Before we continue, we'd like to emphasize one point: we cannot understate our confidence in the Safe Sport program. We firmly believe that the Safe Sport program was an essential step forward for our organization in 2010, and we recognize that it has become a model for other NGBs. That being said, we feel that an older guard in this organization is preventing the program from reaching its full potential. We are stuck celebrating Safe Sport's success as a reporting mechanism, and have failed to be truly visionary about how the program can *prevent* future abuse from occurring.

We appreciate the difficulty of directly challenging USA Swimming. Many of us devote a significant amount of our personal time to this organization, and are truly motivated by creating a fun and safe experience for all swimmers. We also recognize the desire to defend and protect an organization that is so important to us. However, our usual response will no longer suffice. This time is different. We have sports writers advocating for [Olympic sanctions](#) and an overhaul of the [USOC](#). We have Good Morning America anchors [calling on our Board to resign](#). We have nonprofit journals [questioning our integrity](#). We cannot continue to rely on our historical ability to survive this unwanted attention. We must *finally* change.

First and foremost, we must end our preoccupation with USA Swimming's image, while children are suffering at the hands of their coaches. In 2010, then CEO Chuck Wielgus [opened a letter](#) addressed to USA Swimming coaches by writing "In recent days our sport has been portrayed in a very bad light in the media." The letter was supposed to be an apology, and it started with lamentations about the organization's standing in the media. On Monday February 26th, Board Athletes opened [their letter](#) by writing "The recent media coverage regarding USA Swimming, combined with the resignations of two of our senior staff, portrays a negative image of USA

Swimming.” Eight years later, we are still focusing on the wrong problem. We are completely fixated by protecting our image, at the expense of protecting children.

We are sympathetic to Board members who fear retaliation, a loss of credibility, or who aren't comfortable with calling on fellow Board members to resign. We understand the impulse to maintain a face of unity during times of crisis. However, Board members have a few primary legal duties, one of which is the duty of loyalty. This is not a duty to be loyal the Board. This is not a duty to be loyal to individual Board members. This is a duty of loyalty to the organization. This is a duty of loyalty to the organization's members.

The organization deserves action. With the exception of the resignations of Pat Hogan and Susan Woessner, the only response that anybody has been able to muster so far is to condemn the sexual abuse of children. While this is obviously important, it's not exactly a bold or courageous statement. We cannot accept a leadership structure that continues to fail its members. We cannot accept a leadership structure that speaks in innuendo about “events” and “tragedies,” when children are being sexually abused by USA Swimming coaches. We cannot accept a leadership structure that is incapable of atoning for its failures.

We cannot accept leaders who think of image first. We cannot accept leaders who have failed to facilitate a cultural change. We cannot accept leaders who protect their friends and colleagues from facing real consequences. We cannot accept leaders who are blinded by hubris. We cannot accept leaders who advocate for athletes and victims of sexual abuse with their words, but who cower at the opportunity to act.

Today, we start the process of moving forward. To begin this process, we call for:

1. Chairman of the Board Jim Sheehan to call an emergency Board meeting. This issue demands the Board's immediate, serious attention.
2. A detailed, publicly released report on the events of 2010. Why did decades-old accusations come to the surface in 2010? Numerous articles in 2010, (cited above), referred to multiple incidents of sexual abuse as some of the “worst kept secrets in swimming.” Did the Board members who were present in 2010, (many of whom continue to sit on the Board today) know about the accusations before they became public?
3. Board members who do not endorse these acts of reconciliation to resign. Board members who knew about the abuse of children and protected this organization's image in lieu of protecting swimmers to resign. Board members who failed to ask questions, who failed to challenge the status quo, and who failed to uphold their duty of loyalty, duty of obedience, and duty of care to resign. Board members who did not know of these events failed to exercise due diligence and are not fit to serve; and Board members who knew and did nothing failed to protect athletes and are not fit to serve.

Going forward, we will be asking for the following:

1. An independent evaluation of USA Swimming's Board of Directors and USA Swimming's staff. Did the resignations of Hogan and Woessner address the organization's cultural problems? Have we responded appropriately to the accusations of widespread misconduct in our sport? Where can we do more to enhance our existing Safe Sport program?
2. A Task Force comprised of 50% athlete members, to examine the Safe Sport program and establish new goals for the program moving forward, based on the independent evaluator's assessment.

We deeply regret the pain and suffering that numerous children have survived under the organization's watch. We will hold everybody accountable who contributed to this problem. We will create a system that encourages and enables wronged members to obtain justice quickly and transparently.

We must move forward. We demand progress. And we ask firmly that the Board deliver, or step aside.

Sincerely,

ⁱ [2008](#): "On October 17, 2008 USA Swimming executive director Chuck Wielgus received an email from an Orange County parent he was all too familiar with. Two years earlier Tracy Palmero's allegations that U.S. national team director Everett Uchiyama began a sexual relationship with her when she was a teenager swimmer led to USA Swimming firing Uchiyama and [banning him from the sport for life](#). But the firing and ban remained private, protected by a non-disclosure agreement USA Swimming insisted they sign, according to the Palmeros. Joe Palmero, Tracy's father, was emailing Wielgus in 2008 to inform him that Uchiyama was working as the director of aquatics at the Country Club of Colorado in Colorado Springs, just five miles from USA Swimming's headquarters. Palmero also suspected Wielgus already knew."

ⁱⁱ [2010](#): "Rocked by allegations of rampant sexual misconduct within its coaching ranks, USA Swimming unveiled a plan Wednesday to make it easier for athletes to report abuse, look into the need for more thorough background checks and establish clear guidelines for appropriate conduct."

ⁱⁱⁱ [2010](#): Chuck Wielgus refuses to apologize to victims of sexual abuse

^{iv} [2010](#): "...ABC News is drawing a direct link to what has happened in the sport of swimming in the United States to the issues that have ravaged the Catholic Church regarding sexual abuse."

^v [2012](#): "[a] lawsuit charges that while Schubert was involved with a Fullerton swim club, he failed to report allegations of improper conduct between coaches and some of the club's young athletes. Instead, the suit contends, Schubert hired a private investigator to gather evidence against one of the coaches and used it as leverage to extract a \$625,000 settlement from USA Swimming after he was dismissed in 2010."

^{vi} [2014](#): "This is not a new story. In 2010, ABC's *20/20* and the ESPN documentary series *Outside the Lines* [sparked a flare of publicity](#) with its pieces on [Brian Hindson](#), an Indiana coach who secretly videotaped female swimmers in the locker room shower, and [Andy King](#), a serial rapist and coach who preyed on at least 15 girls as he drifted between California towns."

^{vii} [2014](#): In a letter addressed to FBI director James Comey, Congressman George Miller writes "I bring to your direct attention information my staff recently discussed with your Child Exploitation Unit regarding sexual abuse and other sexual misconduct by individuals affiliated with [USA Swimming]...Based on my prior work on child protection, I am confident that the alarming allegations and high-profile reports of sexual abuse in the ranks of USA Swimming necessitate closer scrutiny by the FBI."

^{viii} [2017](#): "'We're hearing all about gymnastics, but the problems in gymnastics are equally as prevalent in every other sport,' said Katherine Starr, a former Olympic swimmer... 'People are starting to understand the complexity of this and how this stays in the system. . . . It stays in the system because of governance, because of the people in charge.'"