

December 2, 2024

Dear USBA Community:

As Chair of the Athlete Health & Safety Task Force, I am pleased to share Vestry Laight's report on safety measures for elite athletes. My takeaway is that USBA has work to do. Policies should be easier to find, reporting should be simpler, communication should be enhanced, and all athletes should feel included and safe. We may have sensed some of these things before. This report now highlights them clearly. This is a significant step. USBA will take this criticism seriously and implement appropriate measures.

After we received the report, we took time to assess its findings and develop a plan of action. It was important to us to make sure that key stakeholders (National Team athletes, staff, and leadership) had appropriate time to receive and digest these findings before it was released more broadly. Recently, President and CEO, Jack Gierhart, discussed the report with national team athletes and staff at their camp in Finland, leading to constructive work sessions on team values, expected behaviors, and a shared vision of team culture.

While I acknowledge the report's value, a few clarifications are necessary:

- We have redacted the name of the U.S. Center for SafeSport claimant discussed in this report due to the confidentiality rules set forth in the SafeSport Code (Article XI. Resolution Procedures, Section S. Confidentiality – Release/Use of Materials).
- There is no doubt that SafeSport has vastly improved the focus on safety and health of athletes; however, the bureaucracy and slow pace of investigations at the Center often leave National Governing Bodies (NGBs) in an uncomfortable position. SafeSport does not communicate with NGBs during an investigation and USBA staff and coaches are expressly prohibited from contacting claimants or respondents while an investigation is in process. There are serious implications for violating the confidentiality of a claimant. When investigations drag on for months or years, it puts the organization in a terrible position, looking like they don't care or are not advocating for their athletes.
- Federal legislation stipulates that NGBs may not charge for a SafeSport complaint. The USBA website contains free and anonymous options for reporting on the SafeSport tab. Members also have access to the USOPC Athlete Ombudsman for free, independent, and confidential advice regarding athlete rights and resolving disputes or grievances.
- The report includes statements and quotes that perpetuate the idea that pre-qualification criteria was changed as retaliation for a SafeSport complaint. In that situation, the criteria was published in the normal course of business as it had been previously. But more importantly, it shows that perception is reality for some athletes, and we have work to do in this regard.

I would be remiss if I did not call out the sections in the report where athletes commented on how things have already improved over the past year. My clarifications are not meant to cloud the work in front of us. Rather, I strive to ensure we stay focused on the work ahead.

USBA has already implemented many of the recommendations included in the report, including Board-approved updates to the bylaws that clarify some of the grievance process. I have attached a separate Action Plan from USBA that outlines work in progress and additional steps.

As the report states, "Revising policies and changing culture can take time to implement and see results." I ask that you have patience with us as USBA executes this action plan. USBA will keep the Board regularly apprised of our progress and report back to our membership annually.

Thank you to the athletes, staff, and parents who took the time to share your views with Vestry Laight. We will be a better organization because of your willingness to participate in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Rachel Steer  
*Chair, Athlete Health & Safety Task Force*  
*Vice-Chair USBA Board of Directors*  
*2002 & 2006 Olympic Team*

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VESTRY LAIGHT

# Athlete Safety Review for the US Biathlon Association

October 1, 2024

## Introduction

Following a determination by SafeSport that a national biathlon champion, ██████████, had been subjected to repeated sexual harassment and unwanted sexual contact by a member of the technical support program, the media and the biathlon community raised questions about the effectiveness of the safeguards in place at US Biathlon Association (“USBA”) to protect athletes. In response to those concerns, and in the interest of ensuring athlete safety, USBA’s Board of Directors (the “Board”) created an Athlete Health & Safety Task Force (“Task Force”). The Task Force retained Vestry Laight as an independent third-party auditor to evaluate the USBA from an athlete welfare and safety perspective. Bearing in mind resource constraints, the scope of the audit is extremely narrow and focused on the area seen as most high-risk: safety measures for athletes who travel internationally. This audit is not intended to be, and is not, a comprehensive review of culture, safety and wellness in the USBA community. Instead, it is an assessment of safety measures and perceptions around safety for athletes at the elite international level, bearing in mind that athlete wellness and safety is essential for high performance.

Although this report does not revisit USBA’s specific actions in the Safesport case that instigated this review, perceptions about USBA’s response to the case provide important context and have had significant impact on how athletes view reporting and their own safety, as discussed further below.

## Methodology

Vestry Laight started this assessment with three virtual town halls where we introduced ourselves to the biathlon community and explained the review process we would undertake. Vestry Laight created a dedicated email address to invite community members to participate in the process. Following the town halls, Vestry Laight traveled to Lake Placid to meet athletes and USBA staff and observe team culture. Shortly afterwards, Vestry Laight sent a confidential survey to 57 athletes who have participated in international competitions since 2020 to gather information about perceptions around safety and misconduct. Vestry Laight also reviewed USBA policies, bylaws, codes, foundational materials, investigative/ethics reports, board meeting minutes, annual reports, SafeSport and USOPC audit reports, and the International Biathlon Associations Integrity Code and Safeguarding Policy. Our analysis is based on policies that were in effect as of September 9, 2024.

Vestry Laight interviewed 24 people for this audit, including a small focus group with parents of elite athletes. Interviewees included USBA staff, club owners, coaches, current and former elite athletes (ranging from Olympic and World Cup to IBU and Juniors) and parents of elite youth athletes. Twelve of our interviewees have competed internationally for USBA in the past two years; two of the athletes interviewed were men. Some interviewees were selected at random by Vestry Laight, others contacted us directly through our dedicated email address or indicated in the survey that they would like to be interviewed.

As per our agreement with USBA, all interviews were confidential to encourage candor. When sharing quotations from the interviews, we have removed identifying information to preserve that confidentiality. We are grateful to those who generously shared their time and insights in interviews and in the survey responses and to USBA staff and board members who promptly responded to all our requests for information.

## Policy Gaps

### Statements Regarding Expected Behavior

USBA has in place several policies and governing documents that address conduct, ethics and complaint processes and investigations.<sup>1</sup> USBA's policies and handbook, which are being revised, provide a place to make a statement about the importance of athletes' well-being and set expectations for respectful and supportive behavior. While the current documents meet compliance guidelines, they do little to promote positive behavior or define what kind of conduct is prohibited. This is a missed opportunity.

The Code of Conduct requires all USBA participants to agree to “adhere to the rules and policies of the U.S. Center for SafeSport, and the athlete safety policy of US Biathlon, and commit to promote sport free from bullying, hazing, sexual misconduct or any form of emotional or physical abuse.” The Team Code of Conduct also requires athletes to “engage in no form of discriminatory behavior or emotional, verbal, physical or sexual harassment or abuse.” Neither code, nor any other policy, provides definitions of prohibited conduct or examples of the behavior in question. It is not clear what the “safety policy of USBA” refers to. The Team Handbook similarly is vague. The lack of a

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<sup>1</sup> These include: By-Laws of the United States Biathlon Association (“By-laws”), the General Code of Conduct for All Participants of USBA (“Code of Conduct”), the Team Code of Conduct, the USBA Grievance Policy (“Grievance Policy”) the Whistleblower And Anti-Retaliation Policy (“Whistleblower Policy”), the Safe Sport, Background Screening and Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (“MAAPP”), a Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest Policy, and the Team Handbook.

safeguarding policy apart from the policy on preventing abuse of minors means there is no definition of harassment or guidance for people who are not sure what is appropriate. Other NGBs and the International Biathlon Union (“IBU”) have more robust policies in place, including stand-alone safeguarding policies or codes of ethics and conduct, that provide examples of unacceptable and positive behavior and might be helpful resources for USBA.

## Grievance Processes

USBA has multiple ways of handling complaints. Under the current By-laws, the Nominating, Governance and Ethics committee has responsibility for overseeing implementation and compliance with the complaint procedure, including overseeing the Complaint and Grievance Committee (“Grievance Committee”) which handles any grievances filed against USBA for failing to comply with its USOPC or legal obligations and complaints by the USBA or a USBA member against another member alleging a violation of USBA’s policies or codes, including SafeSport policy. The Grievance Committee is responsible for creating a Hearing Panel of disinterested parties to resolve the matter. USBA’s Safe Sport, Background Screening and Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (“MAAPP”) policy sets forth another process for reviewing misconduct complaints over which SafeSport has not exercised discretionary jurisdiction. In these cases, if the CEO or Chair of the Board finds there is sufficient evidence to support a complaint alleging emotional, physical or sexual misconduct, he notifies a different Review Panel which consists of board members and an athlete representative.

As a practical matter, USBA has adjudicated very few complaints – only four in the past two years. USBA sends all complaints it receives to SafeSport to ensure that it is not improperly taking jurisdiction over a SafeSport case and then sends the cases returned by SafeSport to the Review Panel.

Although both processes handle similar complaints, the policies and practices are different and inconsistent. It does not appear there is currently an active Grievance Committee in place or that the Hearing Panel has ever been convened, though parties are told that is an option. The Review Panel has become the default mechanism for handling complaints. The complaint processes should be aligned and clarified as part of the renewed look at the by-laws and Code of Conduct. Second, there is inconsistency about requirements for filing a complaint. Although MAAPP policy indicates that a Safesport complaint can be filed by email or through an anonymous google form, a complaint about a code or policy violation, including a SafeSport violation, under the USBA’s By-laws, Code of Conduct and Grievance Policy, must be sworn under oath and sent by certified mail to

the respondent and USBA, possibly with a fee. There is no ability to file a complaint online or anonymously. These requirements make it less likely people will come forward. Other NGBs allow ethics complaints to be filed online via a form and anonymously, with an affirmation that the information provided is accurate.

Moreover, biathlon is a tiny sport where people know each other. The benefit of a Grievance Committee and Hearing Panel format is that it puts complaints in the hands of disinterested parties. Having a committee member from outside USBA receive and oversee complaints would help ensure an investigation's independence. It would have the additional benefit of relieving an already overburdened staff member of having to follow up on these matters. Also, rather than have the Review Panel or Grievance Committee decide whether to use informal processes, USBA might consider offering informal resolution processes to the parties when the complaint is filed to further ensure there is no perception of bias by participants.

## International Policies

The IBU, which oversees international competitions including the World Cup races, the IBU Cup, and the junior and youth championships, has an Integrity Code and Safeguarding Policy that binds national federations and participants as well as its own mandatory training. While relatively new, its Safeguarding Policy contains best practices, defines forbidden conduct including sexual harassment and abuse, provides details about how to respond appropriately to a misconduct report and support someone who makes a report, and includes appendices with examples of model good and bad practices. It also provides for the appointment of an Event Safeguarding Officer who is responsible for ensuring that safeguarding policy is enforced and maintained at international events and competitions and acts as the first point of contact for anyone in need during events and competitions.

How IBU and SafeSport requirements fit together is not clear and may be a function of the relative newness of the IBU Safeguarding policy. However, no information about the IBU Safeguarding policy, its anonymous hotline, or how to contact the Event Safeguarding Officer was referenced in any USBA materials that we reviewed. It was not even clear that all staff is aware of the hotline or the Event Safeguarding Officer. Yet these could be valuable resources, particularly for athletes abroad who are not comfortable reporting to USBA as discussed further below.

## Athlete Safety Survey

To assess athlete's perceptions about safety, reporting and risk of retaliation, in June 2024 Vestry Laight fielded a short, confidential survey to 57 adult and junior athletes who have competed internationally since 2020. To ensure confidentiality, survey responses were accessible only to Vestry Laight. The survey consisted of seven questions that athletes could respond "strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, agree, or strongly agree." It also provided space for long-form answers to four open-ended questions.

Thirty-three athletes completed the survey for a response rate of 58%. Women responded to the survey in higher numbers than men (65% response rate vs 48%).

Although small in scope, the survey reflects the perceptions of USBA's current and most competitive athletes. In the aggregate, the majority of athletes agree or strongly agree that they feel comfortable raising concerns about athlete safety (66%), that they know how to do so (87%), and have confidence that the concern would be investigated (55%). Less than half, however, believe (agree or strongly agree) that they can report without suffering negative consequences to their athletic careers (47%) or that USBA staff and leadership would be held accountable (47%).

When responses are viewed by gender, women's responses are decidedly mixed within the group of women themselves -- and differ dramatically from men's on a few key questions. Most women believe they will suffer consequences for raising a concern (57% vs 43%); more women than not believe that leadership will NOT be held accountable (48% vs 43%). When women's responses are compared to men's, the gap in perceptions is stark. Although almost all men express comfort with raising concerns about athlete safety (92%) only 52% of women do. This may be unsurprising given that women were also more likely than men to express concern about negative consequences to their athletic career for reporting misconduct (57% of women vs 8% of men). This is unfortunate because women were more likely than men to respond that they observed behavior they believed violated the USBA Code of Conduct or SafeSport policy in the past year (43% vs 25%). The write-in comments and the interviews provide further insight into some of the data above and are discussed in more detail below. Although some of the comments point to recent positive changes in the culture, the perception gap that exists between many women and men elite athletes is a problem that needs to be proactively addressed.



## Safety Analysis

The culture in US Biathlon for elite athletes is impacted by the nature of the competitions which require the athletes to live together in close quarters abroad for several months at a time (from November to March), far from their support systems and families. This presents challenges for athletes, who need to get along with each other in a small group of 8 to 10 while competing against each other in highly stressful conditions, as well as on staff who may face extra demands to make things run smoothly. The experience can be emotionally challenging with some athletes feeling isolated and lonely and others describing the close-knit group of staff and athletes to be like family. The tight quarters and pressure cooker situation make it even more important to ensure USBA is creating a supportive team culture and environment.

Our interviews did not reveal egregious examples of ongoing sexual harassment and abuse. Some veteran athletes noted that behavior has improved recently with staffing changes. Although most people interviewed did not express fear for their safety, many described an atmosphere in which comments or “circumstances made [the athlete] feel uncomfortable.” In the interest of conciseness and preserving confidentiality, we have included only a few representative quotes in this written report. However, many people from the survey and interviews provided comments about culture that were consistent and strikingly similar. They described inappropriate material displayed in wax rooms, “low-level microaggressions” and “multiple small instances” of “not ok,” “weird,” or “misogynistic” comments or behavior from staff or other athletes that added up to creating an environment that is not welcoming or inclusive to many women and to some men. As one person said, “It is very uncomfortable as a woman – not unsafe but tough to be in that environment... Lots of little comments layered on top of each other make you feel like you don’t belong.” Many athletes expressed discomfort hearing staff complain or joke about SafeSport (“SafeSport is dumb” “My friend lost his job because of SafeSport”) and felt it added to an atmosphere that discouraged or frowned upon reporting. (“The culture takes away from the benefits of what SafeSport brings.”)

The individual incidents may not seem significant, but “letting them push the boundaries makes it worse.” One experienced athlete noted, “[L]aughing or going along with the jokes, normalizes the behavior and allows it to grow.” And a survey respondent said, “I also feel that sometimes concerns are brought forward that aren’t a violation of SafeSport but are related to behavior contributing to a culture that could create a SafeSport violation.”

Culture is set by what is ignored as much as by what is done and leadership is not seen to be effective at addressing questionable behavior. Interviewees say that “Male coaches are

not using their voices to be supportive;” “Leaders don’t shut it down at all” or “do nothing to rein it in.” One person noted: “Male coaches are not malicious but oblivious and do not realize how valuable it would be to speak up.” Another said, “Historically I don’t think they have understood or appreciated how or why things might make athletes uncomfortable. It felt like a good ole’ boys club.” Male staff sometimes dismiss concerns by saying “It is European culture” and telling athletes to “get used to it.” Inappropriate jokes and comments were written off as “part of the job.” One said she “has not witnessed a super red flag behavior with malicious intent, but keeps hearing ‘It is a different culture’ which is a blanket term and does not feel validating.” Coaches also sometimes minimize concerns by saying “Women are more sensitive.”

Coaches may not appreciate the negative impact the jokes and remarks have on team culture because athletes are reluctant to bring concerns forward. Many expressed concern that if they complained they would be denied training opportunities, financial support, selection for relay teams, a discretionary spot if there is an injury or a place on the national team. Even though selection is based primarily on performance at high level competitions and the International Competitive Committee (ICC) selects teams, there is an element of discretion and many athletes we spoke with believe that team selection is not objective and fear retaliation if they complain.

How USBA responded to ██████ SafeSport case reinforced that concern. Changing the prequalification requirements as USBA did created the impression that ██████ was removed from the team because ██████ reported. This impression, whether or not it is accurate, has cast a long shadow over female athletes. Athletes “in the bubble” who just barely qualified for teams expressed particular concern. As one athlete said “To see someone as high on the national team as ██████ treated like ██████ was means I have no power to say something.” A survey respondent said “it was clearly demonstrated by USBA that if an athlete, especially a female athlete, were to bring up this topic they would risk their spot on the team in the upcoming year.” Another said, “Not speaking out is the best bet if you want to keep competing for USBA.” Even those who do not think there was retaliation expressed concern about how the case was handled. Several people interviewed said they were disappointed not to see a more forceful condemnation of the behavior and more support for ██████ or were put off by USBA’s lack of acknowledgment of wrongdoing.

USBA staff, for their part, insist that they are focused on their objective of getting medals, so their primary incentive is to pick the best athlete regardless of personal dynamics and so “retaliation is a myth.” Moreover, they note that decisions, including the decision about changing pre-qualification requirements, have been unanimous and are made with the

participation of athlete representatives. Athletes who are not selected may often search for other reasons for not making the team, but the changing of pre-qualification requirements in a way that excluded [REDACTED] added grist to the mill for those who believe selection is biased and the unclear communication around the issue has fostered rumors in the community. Concerns about being seen as a troublemaker if you complain go beyond sexual misconduct – interviewees said they were also reluctant to bring up health or wellness issues because they feared it would hurt their chances (or their child’s chance) of being selected for a team.

The environment, particularly but not exclusively, on the women’s team, is one where some athletes feel “disposable” and voiceless. This may undermine team culture and performance and cause people to leave the sport. These feelings are not universal. USBA has a number of staff members within the organization who are genuinely committed to creating a positive environment for athletes and are doing the best they can to make changes with very limited resources. This was recognized by some survey respondents and interviewees who expressed confidence in USBA’s new leadership and the direction it is going and believe the new leadership “has made it obvious that they care and are making the right steps forward” and “take comments and reports very seriously.” Personnel changes have meant that some of the people who made offensive remarks are no longer there. However, athletes still feel they did not necessarily know what options they had for reporting a safety concern while in Europe, had little information about safety or expected behavior apart from mandatory SafeSport training (not one interviewee could remember having any safety briefings before a trip), bemoaned the lack of women coaches and said the sport is dominated by “men who have a very different outlook on how to treat women,” and were disappointed in the lack of attention paid to creating a respectful environment. As one survey respondent wrote:

“Our leadership never took any initiative to set expectations or intentionally build a sense of belonging, collaboration, support across the whole team and staff. This culture building isn’t easy work, but it is worth trying to learn how to improve. I think mutual respect would solve a lot of problems.”

## Conclusion and Recommendations

US Biathlon is a small community; this is both a challenge and an opportunity in moving forward. On the one hand, USBA has very limited resources and it can feel like everyone knows one another; on the other hand, a few targeted interventions can have a big impact, particularly if the leadership and community unite around the same key goals. Vestry Laight’s recommendations focus on strengthening resources and support for members of

the biathlon community who witness or experience misconduct and making it easier to come forward with concerns about unsafe behavior.

The following are recommendations to guide USBA's work for the next 12 – 18 months. We focus below on 1) getting the basics/foundation right in terms of policies and processes around safety and 2) on culture, to ensure the policies are implemented effectively and actively utilized. We advise USBA to publicly commit to the goals and assess and communicate progress against the goals at regular intervals and recognize that some of these changes are already underway.

## Detailed Recommendations

- **Safety:** We are mindful that recommendations around Athlete Safety and Ethics are subject to SafeSport's jurisdiction. These suggestions are meant to co-exist and supplement the SafeSport and IBU scheme, not to interfere with it in any way. USBA should use other NGBs and the IBU as resources and examples for addressing policy gaps.
  - **Policies:** Policies should be updated to address gaps, ensure consistency across policies and remove unnecessary friction that may inhibit reporting.
    - **Conduct and behavior:**
      - Define what **respectful behavior** looks like, what the consequences are when it is not adhered to and set clear expectations for behavior by staff and athletes.
      - Clearly define the organization's values and affirmative behavioral expectations and ensure they are regularly communicated to athletes and well understood by staff as part of building a more supportive and cohesive culture where everyone's victories are celebrated and where athlete safety and wellness is prioritized
      - Revise the By-Laws, Code of Conduct and related Policies to reflect the organization's values as described above. Consider consolidating some of the existing documents to make them consistent and easily accessible.
      - **Address sexual harassment and behavior on the edges** such as unconscious bias and micro-aggressions. Include clear and relatable definitions and examples of prohibited misconduct and unacceptable behavior. Address romantic relationships between athletes, coaches, staff and techs, with a focus on situations where a power imbalance is present.

- Reporting and Investigation:
  - Ensure multiple reporting options
  - Include a mechanism for filing a report on-line
  - Provide for anonymous reporting
  - Eliminate the filing fee and service requirement for filing a complaint
  - Ensure that disinterested parties conduct the investigations (simplify the Grievance Committee and Hearing Panel structure currently in place but not being used, by creating a committee with qualified members/volunteers to investigate and adjudicate complaints.)
  - Hold people accountable for policy violations and not adhering to the values
  - Actively engage with parties prior to competitions or camps about any interim measures in place; after a decision, explain to parties who is responsible for sanctions, how they will be enforced and whom to contact if there is a problem. Develop a strategy to communicate the information to impacted members of the community while respecting confidentiality to avoid rumors.
  - Put in place policies consistent with confidentiality requirements that require regular monthly check-ins with people known to have filed complaints about sexual misconduct (as defined by SafeSport or the Code of Ethics) to ensure they are not experiencing retaliation and to monitor wellness.
  - Designate an advocate to be available to attend meetings with SafeSport or IBU with the complainant or respondent as a support person if they would like to have a person with them during investigative processes.
  
- Communication:
  - Require that athletes (and their parents if the athlete is a youth) and coaches read and acknowledge having read the Code of Conduct as amended after these recommendations

- Prior to the start of the season, have a meeting with athletes (and their parents if the athlete is a youth) about safety, behavioral expectations, and reporting mechanisms.
  - Create an easy one-page road map that describes steps from reporting to investigation to outcome. This visual roadmap of the reporting process should be easy to find and accessible to athletes and staff
  - Train coaches and staff on intervention techniques and appropriate ways to respond to unwelcome behavior and speak out on behalf of athletes, myths about false reporting, navigating mental health issues and clarifying misinformation about what constitutes a SafeSport violation and how the system works.
  - Before international trips, while traveling and during competitions, communicate ways of reporting. Team leaders should provide the roadmap of reporting options as part of the packet of material given to participants, so they have information that is accessible. Include information about the USOPC Ombudsman, IBU reporting mechanisms, the IBU Event Safeguarding Officers, and a list of resources for support that are available to those on the road.
  - Ensure parents who assist on trips take the short SafeSport training for parents or volunteers so they know what to look for and how to intervene and ensure they are familiar with reporting mechanisms.
  - Keep the Board informed – at a high level – of complaints and investigations as a standing agenda item at Board meetings.
- Culture: The goal is to create a culture of respect and inclusion for everyone. USBA should undertake an intentional approach to culture with **clear values** and **affirmative behavioral expectations** that are regularly communicated to athletes and well understood by staff as part of building a more supportive and cohesive culture. Because **tone at the top** is critical to setting the culture – including adherence to and utilization of policies – we recommend a specific focus on building camaraderie and shared commitments and vocabulary among USBA’s leadership and coaching staff.

- USBA
  - As described above, co-create/update the Code of Conduct focused on athletes/coaches/staff and affirmative behavioral expectations and values
    - With input from stakeholders, refine what respectful behavior looks like and what the consequences are when it is not adhered to
    - Set and communicate clear expectations for behavior by staff and athletes
  - Form a Board/volunteer taskforce that will conduct informational interviews/research with three National Governing Bodies whose culture it admires and examine National Guard policies to learn about promising practices to adapt to USBA (as well as how to respond to challenges)
- Leadership and coaches
  - Awareness, education and understanding
    - Create a shared understanding about existing gender perception gaps and challenges to building a safe and inclusive culture by providing opportunity for leadership and coaches to engage substantively with this report’s findings and the direct feedback from athletes.
  - Strengthen leadership “muscle”:
    - Identify/create a series of learning and development modules (not a one-off training) that address team building, unconscious bias, empathy and perspective-taking, bystander intervention and allyship.
    - Encourage cross-gender and reverse mentoring for senior, junior and aspiring coaches.
    - Diversify leadership
      - Strive for more women in leadership with USBA and coaching, including building the pipeline
      - Prioritize hiring a woman coach who can be with the team full time
      - Continue the Women’s Coaching Initiative with concrete goals and accountability
        - Ensure that the Women’s Coaching Initiative provides meaningful training and exposure to the

national team and is integrated thoughtfully with input of European coaching staff

- Cultivate long-term relationships with promising women coaches in adjacent sports and college teams
  - Signal that women coaches belong by ensuring there is gear available for women coaches
- Deepen support for development of women technical officials – the presence of more women at events will enhance participants’ sense of safety
  - Intentionally conduct outreach to communicate opportunities about training (including the online training) for officials and opportunities for officials to work at regional, national and international events
- Transparency, communication and continuous improvement: To ensure this report does more than “sit on a shelf” and is actionable, we recommend a public follow-up assessment 18 months after the report is issued to see that meaningful reforms are being implemented. Transparency and communication around this report, associated actions and the steps USBA is taking to facilitate athlete safety, inclusion and a stronger culture will help keep the work on track and engage the wider community. Specific elements include:
  - Twice yearly Board and community updates/measuring progress and actions taken
  - Safety survey performed in one year to measure changes in perceptions
  - Provide opportunities for anonymous feedback on trips from athletes or parents on safety and wellness issues, such as a post-trip survey
  - Public follow-up assessment in 18 months to evaluate progress and next steps
  - Acknowledgement and ownership of the past
  - Commit to further professionalizing USBA and running it like a business, particularly with respect to hiring of coaches and staff (includes posting and interviewing for jobs), ensuring that the hiring process is open and transparent
  - More transparency in the selection process for teams and clarity around the selection process for training opportunities
    - Consider including reasons for selection when the list is announced, either setting forth the criteria met or providing the rationale for using discretion



- Make criteria for prequalification known before the start of the season so changes do not appear to be retaliatory
- Other Fixes: Revising policies and changing culture can take time to implement and see results. In the meantime, interviewees and survey respondents raised a few issues that caused them discomfort but may be easy to fix. They are listed below. We encourage the Task Force and Board to consider any other changes that can be easily implemented in the near term.
  - Provide a private section of the wax cabin where techs can change or require them to put a notice outside when changing so athletes know not to walk in while the techs are undressed
  - Provide privacy for athletes to disrobe before a massage
  - Consider assigning a more senior athlete as a buddy to new team members so they have an informal resource who can answer questions (A few athletes expressed gratitude for having support or advice from a more seasoned athlete when they began competing.)



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## **Recommendations and Action Plan**

USBA has already implemented many of the recommendations included in the report. Below are a few of the key tasks that have already been completed or are in progress.

### Communication

- Starting in Spring 2024, USBA Board of Director meetings have included a high-level report on SafeSport cases.
- In June 2024, the Athlete Representatives put together a quick reference guide for senior athletes about USOPC and SafeSport resources. This Fall, USBA leadership updated and redistributed this information with additional guidance on resources available through both USBA and the IBU Biathlon Integrity Unit.
- Starting in 2023, the USBA has released pre-qualification criteria prior to the start of the season.

### Diversify Leadership

- This year USBA launched the Women's Coaching Initiative to provide formal mentorship and professional development opportunities for female coaches. Eight women have been selected to work with USBA coaches, wax technicians, and support staff throughout the 2024-2025 season.
- A female Certified Athletic Trainer has been hired to travel with the World Cup team and support the IBU Cup team this winter.
- USBA has been a leader in promoting women in technical leadership roles at the international level. Director of Operations Sara Studebaker-Hall will be the Technical Delegate at the 2025 IBU World Championships in Switzerland—the first-ever female Technical Delegate at an IBU World Championships event.
- USBA's hiring procedure follows transparent practices including collaborative job description development, public posting, candidate diversity, and candidate interviews with multiple stakeholders, including athletes when appropriate.

### Continuous Improvement

- Each Spring, the Athlete Representatives conduct a survey to gather athlete feedback on their experiences from the prior year. The Athlete Representatives report back to the Board and make recommendations for areas of improvement. USBA will integrate feedback from this annual survey and assess USBA's progress against the issues identified in the report.





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## Action Plan

USBA is committed to fostering a safe, inclusive culture. Looking ahead, leadership will hold regular meetings with staff and athletes to define core values, behaviors, and processes, with continuous reviews and adjustments.

- At the November 2024 Finland camp, the National team staff and athletes committed to developing an environment that allows athletes to feel confident, safe and supported in the pursuit of their goals. Staff and athletes conducted the first of a series of culture development workshops where they outlined a vision, started defining a set of core values, and explored the behaviors expected from several of those values.
- In Spring 2025, the team will finalize the values and expected behaviors that were collectively developed and establish a process that USBA and athletes agree to follow.
- USBA will identify metrics to measure progress and determine a schedule for continual review, refinement, and improvement. They will also develop an onboarding program to communicate this work for new members of the team/organization.
- Staff and athletes discussed establishing an anonymous feedback mechanism for athletes to provide input as well as a buddy/mentor system for new athletes and staff joining the team.
- Staff will work with athletes on refining and implementing the report's recommendations for improved privacy in wax cabins and with therapists.
- Over the next nine months, USBA will develop a continuing education roadmap for staff and other stakeholders and outline an implementation plan for selecting and accessing appropriate materials.