



# PRESS RELEASE

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**CONTACT: LAWRENCE ROBERT**  
**323-236-9992**

## **VICTIM'S ATTORNEY JOHN MANLY REBUTTS STATEMENT BY USA GYMNASTICS REGARDING ABUSE OF WORLD CHAMPION GYMNAST MAGGIE NICHOLS**

NCAA top gymnast and former World Champion, Maggie Nichols, stunned the world of gymnastics on Tuesday when she revealed that she was the very first victim of former USAG and Olympic Team doctor Larry Nassar to report his alleged sexual abuse to USAG.

USAG responded with a statement attacking Ms. Nichols' attorney, John Manly, and denying reports that they attempted to silence Ms. Nichols and other alleged victims including Olympic Gold Medalists Aly Raisman and McKayla Maroney. [See USAG statement here.](#)

In a Tweet yesterday, Aly Raisman called the USAG statement, "Hurtful."

This is Mr. Manly's response, "USA Gymnastics statement regarding the horrendous molestation suffered by world champion gymnast Maggie Nichols and her fellow athletes must be exposed for what it is, cynical, false and misleading.

I am truly shocked by the admission by USA Gymnastics that they failed to follow the law and immediately report to Child Protective Services, or to law enforcement, two credible allegations of sexual abuse – one by Maggie Nichols and a second which has been attributed to Ali Raisman.

The law in Indiana where USAG is headquartered, and nearly every other State, requires a mandatory reporter such as USAG to report any reason to believe that a child is a victim of sexual abuse to authorities. Instead, USAG says that they hired an investigator and waited until they had received three reports of suspected sexual abuse before contacting law enforcement. They never called Child Protective Services as the law required.

The fact that they hired an investigator obviously means that they suspected child sexual abuse which they were required by law to immediately report to Child Protective Services and/or law enforcement. They failed to do so.

The investigator they hired, a woman named Fran Sepler, stated this week in an interview with Sports Illustrated that she was not really an investigator at all. Ms. Sepler said, "I was not hired as an investigator, I was only hired to conduct several interviews by USA Gymnastics who indicated they were conducting an investigation into allegations and needed someone who was a skilled interviewer. I did not decide who to speak to and did not provide any or

recommendations except that law enforcement needed to be involved." [See Sports Illustrated article here.](#)

That is not how Maggie Nichols, Aly Raisman and their families have described their interactions with Ms. Sepler. They have all reported that Ms. Sepler encouraged them to keep quiet and not speak to anyone about the abuse.

In a December 22, 2017 interview with Metro US reporter Sam Brodski, Ms. Sepler demonstrated that she has no real understanding of the mandatory reporting laws or the threats posed to children by Larry Nassar.

Ms. Sepler said, "If I interviewed someone who was 20 years old who described historic acts of abuse when that individual was a child, I would generally not inform police or child protection as I would not have information that a child was endangered. This would be the case particularly if I had been given assurance that the hypothetical abuser was not at the time in contact with any potential victims, at least insofar as my client was aware," Sepler continued. "I would, however, immediately and strongly advise my client to contact law enforcement, and I would subsequently cooperate with that law enforcement agency." [See Metro US article here.](#)

At the time Nassar's abuse was reported to USAG he was "treating" children at Michigan State University. After USAG fired Nassar in June 2015 they failed to report the allegations of sexual abuse to MSU and allowed him to circulate a false statement that he had "retired" as USAG and Olympic Team doctor. He continued to allegedly molest children at MSU for nearly 16 months until he was arrested by Michigan police.

USAG says that my suggestion that USAG tried to silence athletes or keep the investigation secret to avoid headlines before the Rio Olympics and protect the Los Angeles Olympic bid is entirely baseless. The facts contradict this false statement. Not only did Ms. Nichols, Ms. Raisman and their families report that USAG urged them to remain silent, USAG required McKayla Maroney to sign a confidentiality agreement about her abuse, which violates California law.

USAG has repeatedly to try and place the blame for silencing the victims on the FBI, stating that they were only acting on the FBI's requests to, "Not to do anything that might interfere with their investigation."

I challenge USAG to make public any communication with the FBI that told them that they should tell victims not to independently report their abuse to law enforcement or speak to the media about it. I am also respectfully requesting the US Attorney for the Southern District of Indiana and the Attorney General of Indiana to conduct an investigation to determine which laws, if any, have been violated by USAG.

USAG has filed motions in Federal court claiming that they had no responsibility to protect athletes from the actions of Larry Nassar and no responsibility to report allegations of his sexual abuse of athletes to Michigan State University, where he continued to practice medicine and

abuse young girls and women for 16 months while the FBI investigation was under way. That is an unforgivable violation of law and breach of responsibility to the tens of thousands of women and young girls that compete under the banner of USAG.”

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[Manly, Stewart & Finaldi](#) is California’s leading law firm representing child victims of sexual abuse. The firm has represented more than 150 victims of clergy sexual abuse in California and hundreds of others throughout the United States. The firm also represented plaintiffs in the \$140,000,000 settlement against LAUSD in the Miramonte case, the largest sex abuse settlement against a School District in the US. They currently represent 107 alleged victims of former Michigan State University and USA Gymnastics Olympic Team doctor Larry Nassar.