

May 17, 2017 House Hearing

Conducted by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

Testimony of Lauryn Williams

Olympian and Proud TrueSport Ambassador

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, good morning. My name is Lauryn Williams; I am a four-time Olympian, three-time Olympic medalist and a proud United States Anti-Doping Agency TrueSport Ambassador. I want to thank this Committee for its interest in clean sport and for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss how we can better protect the rights of athletes around the world.

When I started running at 9 years old I never imagined I would one day be competing in the Olympic Games, much less four times. Yet, I obtained the unobtainable, and I became the first American woman to win medals in both the summer and winter Olympics. I was naturally fast from the start, but innate talent isn't always enough.

The cost of these achievements is high. Opportunities cost. The pursuit of an Olympic dream cost time, money, experiences, social life, but the cost of these things are not a sacrifice but a choice.

But the thing is: while we choose to chase the extraordinary moments, we do so believing the basic idea that every athlete deserves to compete on a level playing field. But sadly, that notion is under attack... and with it, the very credibility of the Olympic Games.

Why?

Because of performance-enhancing drug use.

Shortcuts are being taken for personal gain. Podium moments are being stolen. And perhaps most disheartening, this kind of abuse continues ad nauseam because sport leaders around the world cannot find the will, or courage, to properly protect athletes.

Mr. Chairman I encourage you to imagine an entire life dedicated to the mission of representing your country and achieving your best performance. To give your blood, literally give your blood, sweat and tears, only to have your dreams stolen by someone willing to cheat. Someone willing to corrupt themselves and the sport you love for a hollow victory. It's devastating. And when this happens, clean athletes look to the sport leaders who are supposed to be our advocates... but we seldom get a worthwhile response.

When doping goes unpunished, clean athletes are left wondering: What would my life look like if I had actually competed on a level playing field? Am I owed a moment on the podium? Should I have trained for another Olympics? Did I miss sponsorships or endorsements that only come with an Olympic medal? The unanswered questions degrade the experience significantly.

There is individual suffering when clean athletes lose their moment to cheaters, but it corrupts the experience for everyone. Fans, spectators, sponsors, and society as a whole are left asking “Why play if the game is rigged? ... If the destination has become more important than the journey?”

I’m not the first athlete to say this on Capitol Hill. In February, the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations heard from Adam Nelson, the American shot putter who, nine years after the 2004 Summer Olympics, received his gold medal in an airport food court. And they heard from Michael Phelps, the most decorated Olympian in history, who despite his own unprecedented success, still questions whether he ever truly competed on a level playing field while on the international stage.

The reason that athletes like Adam, Michael, and myself speak on these issues is because we know that here in the United States, we are being held to the highest standard there is.

However, while American athletes are asked to report their whereabouts 24 hours a day, seven days a week so that drug testers can knock on our door unannounced to request we pee in a cup, or give blood, many athletes from other parts of the world are not. The simple truth is, not all elite-level athletes worldwide are being held to the same standard as we are and it is frustrating reality.

I was tested 66 times during my athletic career. That’s 66 different times a doping control officer tapped me on a shoulder after a competition, or showed up at six a.m. to take blood or watch me pee in to cup. That’s 66 times that I bore the burden of having to prove I was competing clean – that I was doing it the right way. Yet, somehow – and this is important... Of the 11,470 athletes who competed in Rio de Janeiro last summer, a staggering 4,125 of those athletes had no record of testing in the 12-months prior to the Games. That’s unacceptable!

So, I'm here today to ask you this:

How many more?

How many more Olympic Games are we going to allow to be corrupted by performance-enhancing drug use?

How many more podium moments need to be stolen?

How many more dreams crushed?

What kind of message are we sending to the next generation of competitors?

As athletes, we have a responsibility to require that our voices heard and that we have an opportunity to be engaged in a conversation that directly affects us. Mr. Chairman I encourage our government, and governments from around the world, to exercise your influence for this important cause.

We are just 266 days away from the Winter Games in PyeongChang... The clock is ticking... The time is now.