

U.S. gymnasts accuse FBI for Larry Nassar's abuses

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Simone Biles testifies before the U.S. Senate

Washington, September 16 (CNN)-- Olympic gymnasts McKayla Maroney and Simone Biles lashed out at the FBI and the Justice Department in Senate testimony Wednesday -- accusing the FBI of mishandling abuse allegations brought against Larry Nassar and then made false statements in the aftermath of the botched investigation.

"I believe without a doubt that the circumstances that led to my abuse, and allowed it to continue, are directly the result of the fact that the organizations created by Congress to oversee and protect me as an

athlete, USA Gymnastics, United States Olympic Committee and the Paralympic Committee, did not do their job," Biles said during her opening statement to members of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

"It really feels like the FBI turned a blind eye to us and went out of its way to help protect USAG and USOPC. A message needs to be established: if you allow a predator to harm children, the consequences will be swift and severe enough," he said.

Biles choked up before saying Nassar's name out loud. "I blame Larry Nassar and I also blame the entire system that allowed and perpetrated his abuse," Biles said. "This is the largest case of sexual abuse in the history of American sports, and while there has been a completely independent investigation into the FBI's handling of the case, neither USAG nor USOPC has been subjected to the same level of scrutiny," Biles said.

"These are the entities that have been trusted to protect our support and our athletes, but it appears that questions of accountability and organizational failures remain unanswered," she added.

Maroney and Biles were joined by gymnasts Maggie Nichols and Aly Raisman, who were also among the hundreds of athletes assaulted by Nassar, the former USA Gymnastics team doctor now serving a multi-decade prison sentence.

Raisman called for more investigation into how the Nassar investigation was handled and said the FBI pressured her to accept Nassar's plea deal.

"The agent diminished the importance of my abuse. He made me feel it wasn't worth pursuing my criminal case," Raisman said.

Allegations about Nassar first came to the agency in July 2015. Several protocol violations led to months of delays, as captured in a scathing report by the Justice Department's inspector general released in July.

While the federal investigation languished, Nassar abused dozens of victims, according to the inspector general's report.

FBI officials "failed to respond to Nassar's allegations with the utmost seriousness and urgency they deserved and required, made numerous and fundamental errors when responding to them, and violated multiple FBI policies," the report said.

"They allowed a child molester to go free for more than a year, and this inaction directly allowed Nassar's abuses to continue," Maroney told the Senate Judiciary Committee after recounting the vivid details she provided to the agent who interviewed her about Nassar's abuses.

"What's the point of reporting abuse if our own FBI agents are going to take it upon themselves to bury that report in a drawer?" she added.

Maroney identified herself as the gymnast described, but not named, in the report who spoke to the FBI about her allegations in September 2015. The agent who took her interview violated key FBI procedures and made false statements in a summary the agent wrote of the interview more than a year later, according to the inspector general's report.

She and others criticized the Justice Department for its decisions, according to the inspector general's report, not to prosecute the agent, as well as an FBI supervisor who was also accused of mishandling the investigation and subsequently making false statements about it.

"After telling my entire story of abuse to the FBI in the summer of 2015, the FBI not only failed to report my abuse, but when they finally documented the report 17 months later, they made completely false claims about what I said," Maroney recalled.

Later in the hearing, Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz noted that the false information could have jeopardized the criminal case brought against Nassar.

"The Justice Department declined to prosecute these individuals - why?" said Maroney, while singling out Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco for her absence at Wednesday's hearing. "It's the Justice Department's job to hold them accountable.

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