

Statement of Fran Sepler to Dateline NBC
April 12, 2018

My foremost concern is for the victims of Dr. Nasser. My heart goes out to all of them for what they have suffered, and I applaud their courage in coming forward.

My role with USA Gymnastics was limited to independently determine if certain concerns raised were legitimate, and I determined in just a matter of days that they were. I was retained in July 2015 by USA Gymnastics to interview a single athlete to determine if there was reason to believe that sexual abuse had occurred. I was not hired to conduct a full-independent investigation.

I interviewed this first athlete on July 11, 2015, clearly stating that I had been retained by USA Gymnastics to look into remarks overheard by a coach. Although this interview did not present a clear case of abuse, I was concerned enough to press USA Gymnastics to conduct additional interviews. Within days, at my recommendation and urging, two more athletes were interviewed. The third athlete I interviewed -- an adult -- presented an unambiguous claim of sexual abuse. I promptly reported back to USA Gymnastics and recommended they immediately contact law enforcement. All three of my interviews were completed within 12 days in July 2015. I understand that USA Gymnastics then immediately contacted the FBI and my retention by USA Gymnastics was concluded.

Based upon the years I have worked with victims of abuse and my concern for those victims, I responded to the suggestion that one of the athletes wanted to initiate her own inquiry by cautioning this athlete and pointing out that the process was still underway. I regret that my communications have now been construed by some to have some other meaning. At no time did USA Gymnastics ask me to cover up any information or direct me to silence anybody. And, indeed, I did not attempt to silence anyone or hide anything. I told USA Gymnastics not what they perhaps hoped to hear, but what they needed to hear. Any suggestion my intent was to the contrary is belied by my instruction to USA Gymnastics, made immediately after the final interview, that my findings be reported to law enforcement.

I have spent the better part of my professional life working to protect children and others from sexual assault. I served for five years as the Child Sexual Abuse Specialist for the State of Minnesota, training law enforcement officers, child protection workers and mental health professionals regarding sexual abuse of children and how to interview them. I also served as the Co-Chair of the Minnesota Attorney General's task Force on Sexual Assault and today train hundreds of organizations on sexual harassment and abuse prevention and reporting. I am pleased that my limited involvement in this matter helped bring the egregious abuse to light so that Dr. Nasser has been stopped and punished and the victims can find justice and peace.

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