

June 10, 2025

Senate Committee on Finance & Revenue

Written testimony of Mary Cain in Opposition to SB 1196

Chair Meek and members of the Committee, my name is Mary Cain and I am a first year medical student at Stanford University. Before I started medical school, I was a national record-breaking athlete. In 2013, I was the youngest American track & field athlete to make a World Championships team. Later that same year, I signed a professional running contract with Nike, so that I could train full-time with my coach, Alberto Salazar, and his team, the Nike Oregon Project.

I was only 16 when I got the call from Salazar, who at the time was the world's most famous track coach. He told me I was the most talented athlete he'd ever seen, and I immediately began working with him. Less than two years later, I moved to Oregon to train with him and his team full-time at Nike world headquarters, with many of the fastest athletes in the world. It was a total dream come true. Until it became a nightmare.

I have shared a part of my story publicly before, in a 2019 *The New York Times* opinion piece. I will reshare some of that story with you here.

I joined the Nike Oregon Project because I wanted to be the best female athlete ever, but instead I was emotionally and physically abused by a system, designed by Salazar and endorsed by Nike. The all-male staff systematically set out to convince me that to get better, I had to get thinner and thinner and thinner. Keep in mind, this elite running program had no certified sports psychologists, no certified nutritionists, just a staff of Salazar's friends. If I had a question, or problem, they would simply tell me to listen to Alberto. The pressure to lose weight from him was relentless. He created an arbitrary number of 114 pounds for me to get to and stick to. He would usually weigh me in front of my teammates and shame me if I wasn't hitting weight. He wanted to give me birth control pills and diuretics to lose weight, the latter of which, isn't allowed in the sport.

My mind was in duress, being so focused on the number on the scale. And as my mind fell apart, so did my body. I learned an important biology lesson the hard way – when people are pushed beyond what is healthy, relative energy deficiency in sports (REDs) can set in, causing a woman to stop having her periods. Mine stopped for more than 3 years. And if you're not getting your period, you're not getting the necessary levels of estrogen to maintain strong bone health. In my case, I broke 5 different bones.

I felt scared, alone and trapped with no way out. I started to have suicidal thoughts and cutting myself. An NOP staff member witnessed me cutting and I told other coaches, including Alberto, but no one did anything, increasing my feeling of isolation.

I left the NOP in 2016, and for years I was unable to see how inappropriate and harmful this team was.

It wasn't until September 2019 that Salazar was banned from the sport and from Nike due to his involvement in a doping-scandal. By October 2019 Nike CEO Mark Parker also stepped down. This shocking moment kickstarted my own healing journey, as well as invigorated me to get involved in advocacy work to make sure what happened to me never happens to another person.

There is a systemic crisis in sports -- young athletes are experiencing abuse at alarming rates. My case and other cases have shined a light, but meaningful work to enact real change still needs to be done.

Senate Bill 1196 is a dangerous bill at the wrong time. It would allow abusive coaches like Alberto Salazar extra cover, extra protection from the law, and leave survivors like me with no way to hold them accountable. Team sport conglomerates like Nike could use legislation like this to make their athletes sign waivers, to immunize themselves from any wrongdoing or abuse perpetrated by any of their athletic staffing.

From my own lived experience, this bill deeply concerns me. I am on the board of the nonprofit, The Army of Survivors, a nationwide nonprofit working to protect athletes from sexual, physical and psychological abuse and ensure perpetrators and enablers are held accountable. This bill is counter to our mission.

I urge you to vote **NO on SB 1196**. Thank you.