

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 20, 2021

Dr. Cheri Blauwet
President
US Paralympics - United States Olympic Committee
1 Olympic Plaza
Colorado Springs, CO 80909

Dear Dr. Blauwet

I am writing today regarding disturbing reports detailing inequities that USA Paralympians are facing at this year's Tokyo Paralympics. This week, Becca Meyers, a six-time Paralympic medalist who won three gold medals in Rio five years ago, withdrew from the upcoming games after being denied access to a personal care attendant as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

Ms. Meyers is deaf-blind, but in the past that hasn't stopped her from competing – and winning – at the highest levels. But this year, she and other athletes with disabilities are being denied adequate access to personal care assistants. While all Olympic and Paralympic athletes are being impacted this year by COVID-19 safety protocols, athletes must have access to the accommodations necessary for them to safely compete in the games – including access to one-on-one support. Ms. Meyers relies on a personal care attendant to help her navigate new places and to communicate, both essential to her successfully competing in Tokyo. In this particular case, the swim team has been reportedly given one personal care attendant for 33 athletes, including nine with low vision – far too many athletes for one personal care attendant to provide consistent communication and navigation support.

Since the first Paralympic Games in 1960, the Paralympics have served a critical role in giving athletes with disabilities the same experiences and opportunities to compete as their peers without disabilities. These games are invaluable, and demonstrate at a global level what it means for individuals with disabilities to be fully included. Athletes with disabilities are only able to compete at this level when they have access to the necessary supports and accommodations that they need to be successful. They should not be forced to navigate the Tokyo Olympics without the support that they need, particularly in the midst of a global pandemic.

As safety protocols to mitigate COVID-19 are developed and implemented, the essential supports that allow athletes to compete must not fall by the wayside. Too often accommodations for individuals with disabilities are treated as optional instead of necessary – including in places of work, public transportation, and even in hospitals. The Paralympic Games should set an

example for the world – setting a level playing field that is only possible when athletes with disabilities receive the services and support that they need to be fully included and to compete.

Ms. Meyers should have never been forced to withdraw from the games because she wasn't given the necessary support and I strongly urge the US Olympic & Paralympic Committee to work immediately to address this issue. We must ensure that all of our athletes are able to compete safely at this summer's Olympic and Paralympic Games – including by providing them with necessary accommodations.

I appreciate your attention to this matter.

With every good wish,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Maggie Hassan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Margaret Wood Hassan
U.S. Senator

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 20, 2021

Seiko Hashimoto

President

The Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games

Dear President Hashimoto:

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Margaret Wood Hassan
U.S. Senator

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WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 20, 2021

Sarah Hirshland
Chief Executive Officer
United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee
27 S Tejon St.
Colorado Springs, CO 80903

Dear Ms. Hirshland:

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Margaret Wood Hassan
U.S. Senator

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July 20, 2021

Susanne Lyons
Board Chair
U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee board of directors
27 S Tejon St.
Colorado Springs, CO 80903

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