

Michigan Assistant Attorney General Angela Povilaitis addressed the court in Lansing before former USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University doctor Larry Nassar was [sentenced to 40 to 175 years in prison by](#) Judge Rosemarie Aquilina on Wednesday January 24, 2018.

The prosecutor's statement:

"The breadth and ripple of this defendant's abuse and destruction is nearly infinite. It centers in the Lansing and Michigan State University communities and it spans the state of Michigan and reaches club and elite training gyms, collegiate athletics and even the United States and international Olympic communities. And it's not even limited to gymnastics as athletes from over a dozen different sports have reported abuse. His practiced and perfected abuse spanned over 25 years and included countless victims, beginning before he was even a doctor, one who traveled the world seeking gold. But we know his access to children and young women and his abuse did not end until an investigative news report and one brave woman came public to stop him.

The basic facts of his assaults have been recounted by the charged victims in this case as well as numerous victims who gave their impact statements. The facts that the defendant admitted to your honor, under oath, that he penetrated these young girls' vaginas and anuses with his bare hands, not for any medical purpose, but for his own sexual pleasure. He had erections as he performed these so-called treatments. He asked 11 year olds to tell him if they were on their periods so he could be sure they were ripe for his abuse. Children that were prepubescent, often unaware of their bodies. Children whose parents sat feet away, near children. But the assaults he perpetrated on these trusting young girls was not limited to the hours and hours and hours of sexual penetration.

The defendant is a twisted, beloved, renowned doctor who used his prestige to gain the trust of these girls, to exploit them, leaving many of them emotionally shattered, used by a man that they not only trusted but also loved. He supposedly practiced osteopathic manipulative medicine but in truth, he was simply a master manipulator. He manipulated victims and parents. He manipulated his community through the press and social media early in this case. And he tried to manipulate the police department in his interviews. He tried to manipulate prior investigators. He even tried to manipulate your honor and this court through his pathetic letter. All while knowing the truth, that he did the things he was accused of doing. And in competitive gymnastics, he found the perfect place for this master manipulation.

In gymnastics, young girls do what they are told. They hide their pain, they hide their injuries. These young girls bared all of it. Their bodies were constantly on display and under scrutiny. It takes some kind of sick perversion to not only assault a child but to do so with her parent in the room. To do so while a lineup of eager young gymnasts waited to see the gymnastics god, Larry Nassar. It's a sick perversion when a defendant's close family, friends were upstairs in his own home while he abused young Kyle Stephens, just 6 years old when it began.

His own wife and children sat upstairs for years while he gave his basement treatments. To unnecessarily and without warning penetrate an unsuspecting minor for your own selfish sexual gains while her parent sat just feet away, unknowing, had to be part of the rush or the thrill for this defendant. The thrill that he might just get caught.

But he was a master. He had developed a built-in defense. No coach should be in a shower with a boy. No priest has an excuse for any type of sexual touching. But Nassar perfected a built-in excuse and defense. He was a doctor and a good one. So the world thought. And this makes up the other half of his scheme. The trust he could garner from being not only a doctor, a respected professional but an Olympic doctor, one who treated these young girls, these young victims' heroes. He adorned his office with pictures of Olympians he treated, with the far-off places his supposed expertise took him. He brought back tokens for his precious victims, regalia from competitions around the world. In doing so, he made each of his victims feel special. As Kassie Powell said, the defendant hid behind Olympic rings and Spartan green and white.

For many of these girls, Nassar was not just a doctor but a confidant, a role model, sometimes the only affirming male influence in their lives. The level of Nassar's predation reaches even higher because he often knew the victim's parents, some of whom were fellow doctors, others who unwittingly sent patients to him. He even knew some of the parents were police officers. He was so well practiced in his abuse and continually empowering himself that he believed he would get away with it despite any parents' profession. He believed he was untouchable. This defendant not only robbed these children of their innocence, he robbed many of them of their good health. He performed no healing, only hurt. With so many heartbreaking stories of unnecessary treatments, misdiagnoses, inaccurate medical treatment, which we know has resulted in lasting permanent damage. Many of these survivors wonder whether their now lifelong injuries could have been treated had he not wanted the continued access to their young bodies. He wasn't a world-renowned doctor. As one of our experts so eloquently put it in preparing this case for trial, he was performing hocus pocus medicine.

Over the last 16 months, as I have prepared this case and lived this case and thrown my heart and soul into this case, I have often wondered: did he really think he was going to get away with this? Abusing so many for so many years over two decades. So many sports. No patient, no child was safe. And yet, he also abused some of our most prominent national heroes. Maybe he did think he could beat the odds and you know what, for years he did. What that did, that beating of the odds to Kyle Stephens, to Jessica Thomashow, to Madeline Jones, Kaylee Lorincz and Bailey Lorenzen, to victims D, and G and I, to Rachael Denhollander. History gave him guidance for the future, every previous time there had been an allegation, nothing happened. His lies worked. This court heard from several women, some decades later, who were initially determined to be confused or to be liars. He was believed over these children. Larissa Boyce, Tiffany Thomas, Brianna Randall and Amanda Thomashow. Sometimes four, 14 and 20 years have passed since those brave women told someone. You saw and heard firsthand. To know your truth, to be called a liar, by not only your abuser but to also not be believed by other trusting adults. What does that do to a person? Adults who were supposed to protect you and could have made it stop and could have prevented others from the same fate. What does that do to a child? We saw first hand what it does. And with each time he got away, he was empowered to continue and perfect and abuse even more.

It should not take finding a collection of 37,000 vile and disgusting images to believe these women and girls. It shouldn't take investigative journalists to expose predators. It should not take one brave woman put in the unenviable position and choice to go public with her name and be the only public person for months. But thank God we had these journalists. And that they

exposed this truth and that they continued to cover this story. Thank God Rachael Denhollander made the first contact with the reporter and decided to allow them to publish her name. How many times have we heard that without those stories and Rachael, victims would not have reported, they would not be here to speak this week, to expose what truly happened all of these years behind those doors and under that towel.

We have all learned a few lessons from this case and these past seven days of powerful testimony. As I reflect back, an entire semester of a college class in sexual abuse -- grooming behaviors and why victims delay and predatory behavior has played out this past week and a half. But as we look back on this case in the last seven days, I'm struck by a number of observations. What does it say about our society that victims of sexual abuse have to hide their pain for years when they did nothing wrong? What does it say about our society when victims do come forward and they are automatically met with skepticism and doubt, treated as liars until proven true? What do we take away from this?

These have been important narratives to hear and witness and listen to. They will be the words that burn down cultural stereotypes and cultural myths. And I have a few takeaways and lessons I hope anyone watching these past seven days has learned and will take away with them. The first is that we must start by believing. Other adults must start by believing when children and young people report abuse, regardless of who the perpetrator is. No matter his education, his position, the respect he commands, or the awards and adoration he has received. Research shows that false allegations are slim, that most perpetrators are serial offenders and that how a victim, especially a child, is treated when they disclose, if they are believed and supported and not blamed, can affect their well-being for years and can support better outcomes within the criminal justice system and protect other victims.

Yet, even after the first day and the conclusion of the first week, it was brought to my attention by many involved in this case that there are still people in this very community and elsewhere, I would imagine, who are saying that these women were all in it for the money or the attention. Are you kidding me? After 150 heart-wrenching, raw, graphic, visceral impact statements, how can anyone ... believe that? Even to this day, even as this historic sentencing hearing is broadcast around the globe, there are still likely people who doubt. Perhaps those 2,000 folks who voted for this defendant as school board member. Perhaps the many petition writers we're aware of -- who included doctors and trainers and athletes and lawyers -- who spared nothing to come to the defense of this defendant over 16 months ago. And continued to defend him for months even after he had been charged with Kyle Stephens' abuse. I hope and pray that they are watching, that they are listening and that they have learned their lesson.

The second lesson I take away and hope others do, is that anyone can be a perpetrator, anyone can be a serial sexual abuser. This defendant stole, cheated and lied. He stole these victims' innocence. He lied about his behavior and he cheated parents and the community and the world of the trust they held in doctors, prominent physicians and prominent community members. Experts teach on this issue. Russell Strand teaches on offender dynamics and behavior. Strand talks about how abusers have three personas. The first is the public one for all to see. The second is the uninhabited persona, what you only let others close to you see. We all have those two personas, but the third is the hidden and secret one. It's hidden in the mind and the eyes and

beliefs of the perpetrator. And that persona is often hidden well. Serial child molesters hide among us. We know that this defendant had a good persona, a good public persona at least. He was the good guy, the goofy guy and Olympic doctor, the medical school professor, the gymnastics god. He was a religious and pious man, a father, a husband, a friend, a school board candidate, a man of honor and passion. So kind and giving and always approachable. He never charged for his services and he saw patients basically anywhere.

But we know, without a doubt after the seven days, what we on this team have known for 16 months: that Nassar's third hidden persona, just as Strand discusses, that he is possibly the most prolific serial child sexual abuser in history. A selfish child molester who spared no one. Nassar hid behind that outer facade that is different and faked and not real but that people believed were real. People came to his defense. They believed that they were the man that he wanted them to see and not the monster hiding beneath.

As a society, our response cannot be that he couldn't do this. Or that I knew his character, I knew he wasn't capable of this kind of crime. It's because no one wants to see it. The only person who sees this side are his victims. Then the perpetrator goes back, shows only what he wants the world to see. This is how he got away with this for so long and got people to believe him over the many, many, many victims who reported. Anyone can be an abuser. The third takeaway from this week is that delayed disclosure of child sexual abuse is not unique. In fact, it's quite the norm. Kids don't report sexual abuse right away, either because the abuser is a trusted adult, especially when it's a doctor, especially when they are so young and have no sexual experience to understand what is wrong.

The fourth takeaway is that predators groom their victims and families. This is so confusing to so many women. He was so nice, he gave them presents and trinkets and desserts. He broke rules for them, especially when you contrast his behavior and relationship to the harsh and cruel and abusive coaches that these girls were exposed to. He was only doing that to gain their trust, to confuse them and get what he wanted. The (fifth) takeaway, is we must teach our girls and boys to speak up. Kids are told to be respectful of adults. Girls and boys don't speak up. It is easier to put up with discomfort than cause waves. And when they are brave, nothing happens. We teach our girls and daughters to be too nice, to just ignore and put up with uncomfortable situations, to stay silent when they should be allowed to be heard. We need to teach them to continue to speak up until someone listens and helps.

The sixth takeaway from this week and a half is that police and prosecutors must take on hard cases regardless of who the offender is. They cannot shy away from tough cases because of who the offender is or his position in the community. They cannot victim-blame or wait until they have the perfect case. They cannot wait until they have dozens of victims who have come forward. Police and prosecutors must also start by believing, be victim centered and offender focused in their work.

The final takeaway is that we as a society need investigative journalists more than ever. What finally started this reckoning and ended this decades-long cycle of abuse was investigative reporting. Without that first *Indianapolis Star* story in August of 2016, without the story where Rachael came forward publicly shortly thereafter, he would still be practicing medicine, treating

athletes and abusing kids. Let that sink in for a minute. Right now, he would be at his office ... not far from this courtroom and the Michigan State University campus abusing children, had it not been for the investigative reporters and Rachael who brought this case. We know federal law enforcement did not stop him nor did trainers or coaches or deans or medical supervisors. Victim disclosures to adults didn't stop him. Reporters began the story and excellent victim-centered, offender-focused police and prosecutors grabbed the baton and brought us here today.

I'm proud of the work of the Michigan State University Police Department and our team at the attorney general's office. There is no more supportive police chief in this country than Chief Jim Dunlap. And our victims and the public are incredibly lucky to have their case investigated by arguably the best sex crimes detective in the country and her team. Detective Lt. Andrea Munford is not only a smart, dedicated and hard-working investigator, but she is also empathetic and compassionate. Our victims are also lucky to have the full and unwavering support of Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette, who from day one of taking on this case has supported this prosecution fully. Our team is so proud of these young women for speaking. So many have shared their story and name and face and they should feel no shame because they did nothing wrong. He did.

It's worth remembering once again that it was one woman who came public first, and when she did, she was ridiculed. Folks rallied behind him. They tried to discredit her. They signed petitions in support of him. They believed him over her because of who he was purported to be. People continued to support him in this very community and believe him after we charged Kyle Stephens' case, after he faced multiple counts of criminal sexual conduct first against a minor. They chose to believe his lies over the words of a young woman who had nothing to gain by coming forward. Nothing. Some of his support wavered after he was charged with possessing tens of thousands of images of child pornography.

Yet, still there were people in power who had ideas he was framed and the images were planted, who were telling other victims this as they knew their truth. At the same time that these folks were supporting him and putting out those false narratives, these women and countless more you haven't met and who may be watching and reading, knew their truth. They knew he had abused them and they watched him continue to lie about committing that abuse. It has not been an easy process for these victims, especially Rachael, all alone publicly for many, many months. To be accused of being a pied piper of sorts in court, in the press, to be accused of somehow planting this idea of victimhood in other women's minds, the gripping testimony these past two weeks have shown how absurd those arguments are.

You have seen first-hand the effects this abuse has had on these women. That is tangible, physical evidence that this happened, that these women were abused, not bandwagon jumpers, not money grabbers. Women and girls who were abused. For victims to realize years and decades later that they were, in fact, abused, sometimes hundreds of times when they really thought they were receiving legitimate treatment, it shifts their equilibrium. It shatters their sense of the world, their sense of safety, their conception of trust. It has caused them to question what they believe and know, and that has lasting consequences. Unlike any other crime that comes before you Judge Aquilina, sexual abuse and assault so deeply affects and alters victims' lives. It seeps and oozes and permeates into every pore and crevice of a victim's life. It can alter their

life's trajectory. We've seen that time and time again this week when we've heard mention of depression and anxiety and panic attacks, suicidal thoughts, self-medication, self-harm, question of self-worth, and even when we heard [from Donna Markham some seven days ago about the suicide of \(her daughter\) Chelsey.](#)

Nassar sentenced these little girls and other little girls to lives in prison by fear and doubt. The courage it takes to overcome so many little obstacles to try and right your world and just live normal daily life, again, is immeasurable. They had to overcome these obstacles on a daily basis for the rest of their lives. His sexual abuse turned their world upside down and inside out, but this process of support and this courtroom and the community helps bring healing. Your honor, I wholeheartedly want to thank you and your staff for graciously allowing each victim to be heard. When we fashioned a sentence agreement allowing for the reported victims to speak, which at that point, was in the neighborhood of 120 victims, survivors, we wanted all to feel involved in this process and to have their voice heard.

What we have witnessed here in this courtroom exceeded even my wildest dream. What we have witnessed here is unprecedented but hopefully not the last time that victims will be heard in this manner. The compassion and empathy that you have shown these women, the support and encouraging words you have given each one, coupled with what I know is the belief that they and their stories matter, will be remembered by all long after this case is over. Over 150 women had courage to walk into this courtroom, most to be publicly identified and outed to the world as a Nassar victim for the first time.

Yet, they have the grace and the courage to speak their truth and become survivors. To each survivor, thank you. Thank you for coming forward, for trusting us, for doing what is so hard and difficult, especially when you reported to the police, especially to those involved in our charging cases and especially to those who have had to testify in court. On behalf of the entire Attorney General and Michigan State University Police Department team, we believe you and always have. We thank you. We are proud to stand up for and with you, and you are our heroes.

We have seen the worst of humanity and the best in these past few days. The pain and destruction caused by evil, selfish takers like this defendant, but we have also seen how one voice can start a movement. How reckoning can deliver justice. How a community can support and empower and start healing. During these last seven days on our screen, you have seen countless young, innocent faces. That was on purpose. Every day at this podium that I stand, you saw strong, brave, fierce survivors come here. But that's not who Larry Nassar saw. He was attracted and abused to those young girls in those pictures. But your honor, what you did not see are the sweet, young, innocent faces of girls who have been spared a similar fate because these brave women all spoke up, and more importantly, never gave up. There is no doubt he would have continued to abuse unabated for the rest of his life. I tell these survivors to be proud of what you have accomplished because you are survivors. You have referenced the army of survivors that this proceeding and his abuse has created. This past weekend at women's marches around the country, signs with Kyle Stephens' quote, someone that the world did not even know was affiliated with this case some five days before, those quotes were raised on signs. Little girls don't stay little forever. They turn into strong women who have come back to destroy your

world. You heard from Jennifer Rood-Bedford, and she concluded by saying, "Stand for truth, resolve for change, be committed."

At this particular moment in history, this sentencing hearing will be viewed as a turning point in how our community, our state, our nation, our culture looks at sexual abuse. This courtroom ... was where the shame that many survivors felt was exorcised from them and put where it belongs, right on him. When each survivor came forward and shared their name, told their truth, supported each other, that shift grew. The world has witnessed what happens when victims are treated with respect, dignity, empathy, compassion and are truly supported by police, prosecutors and the criminal justice system and courts. What is obvious is that a strong group of determined women can, in fact, change the world and will. The fact that women led the investigation, the prosecution team, and that three female judges now sentenced defendant Nassar is poetic justice. As I reflect on the last seven days of the sentencing hearing, it became clear that each day more women and girls were empowered. It was evidenced by our growing number (of) people that were reaching out to us to come to speak their truth. These women and girls have transformed themselves before our very eyes from victim to survivor to champion for justice and advocates for change.

In all of this, the world outside will carry on. But I want to recenter you and this court and all involved back on the reason we're here. The sentencing of defendant Larry Nassar for his admitted conduct against numerous young girls. He sexually assaulted them. He did so under the guise of medical treatment, and he did so for his own sexual purpose and gratification. He carried out his plot through a decadeslong process he honed and perfected, creating perfect conditions for his predatory behavior. Until these brave women brought it all down. Sentencing, your honor, must protect, punish and deter. Through your sentence, I ask you to do all three. I ask you to bring victims the justice they so deserve.

We ask you to sentence the defendant to a minimum of 40 years to at least 125 years in prison on a sentence you see fit. Thank you."

Angela Povilaitis

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As a senior attorney in the attorney general's Criminal Division, Angela Povilaitis runs a statewide cold-case sexual assault project and prosecutes cases of multi-victim and multijurisdictional sexual assault, domestic violence and stalking. She has developed protocols and training for law enforcement and prosecutors nationwide, such as a video about trauma-informed approaches. Considered a "top gun litigator," Povilaitis was the lead prosecutor in the case against Larry Nassar. She prosecuted a former priest and a defendant who was identified through a previously untested rape kit.

Post-script: Michigan State University President Lou Anna Simon resigned but will be paid \$750,000 for 2 years, then \$562,000 per year afterwards if she returns to a faculty position.