

An Open Letter to the Field Hockey Canada Board of Directors

Introduction

The men's senior national team (MNT) and women's senior national team (WNT) have lost complete confidence in the CEO of Field Hockey Canada (FHC), Susan Ahrens, and call for her immediate removal.

We are compelled to speak publicly about the situation within FHC, which has reached a breaking point. For years, we have internally raised concerns about safe sport, financial mismanagement, governance failures, staff turnover, and our limited opportunities to compete internationally. These issues directly affect our ability to perform, qualify for major tournaments, and represent Canada with pride on the world stage.

Despite our repeated efforts to engage constructively with FHC leadership and the CEO, Ms. Ahrens, our concerns have been dismissed, minimised, or ignored. The result is a system that is unsafe and unsustainable for the athletes who dedicate their lives to representing Canada. During Ms. Ahrens' tenure, the MNT and WNT have dropped a combined 15 places in the international rankings, and the junior programs have suffered their worst-ever defeats. Athlete tour fees and program levies have skyrocketed, and both programs have played fewer international matches per year than ever before. Additionally, athlete and staff turnover have never been higher.

We did not come to this decision lightly. Still, as athletes, we have a responsibility not only to ourselves, but also to future generations of Canadian field hockey players who deserve better.

This letter begins with a summary of our concerns. Following that, we outline in detail the evidence that underpins each concern and the urgent changes required if Canada is to have any chance at success on the international stage.

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Summary

Safe Sport Failures

In 2022, FHC proposed the hiring of Peter Milkovich as MNT head coach despite previous allegations of maltreatment against him.¹ When the MNT wrote a letter voicing their concerns about his history, FHC staff communicated to the MNT that they must be more supportive of Mr. Milkovich's hiring, or else they would be without a coach at the 2022 Commonwealth Games. The MNT asked for adequate Safe Sport measures to be implemented, but were dismissed. Ms. Ahrens ignored multiple warnings regarding Mr. Milkovich's history, and as a consequence, maltreatment of team members occurred during the 2022 Commonwealth Games. After an independent Safe Sport investigation into Mr. Milkovich's behaviour resulted in a verdict of maltreatment, Ms. Ahrens failed to publish the Safe Sport decision in a timely manner, nor openly report the ruling, in direct violation of FHC policy. Attempts by the MNT to publish the FHC registry and questions from the PSOs were met with strong resistance and whitewashing from Ms. Ahrens. In effect, Ms. Ahrens swept the case under the rug. FHC's Strategic Plan states that it "will be honest (even if the truth is tough)".² Ms. Ahrens failed to be just that. Ms. Ahrens' actions are inconsistent with an organisation tasked with protecting its members, but are consistent with protecting itself and herself. No public statement by Ms. Ahrens regarding the actions and the events leading to the suspension has been published. There has been no recognition of Safe Sport failures that led to this situation. There has been no apology to the people directly affected, including the MNT and the wider field hockey community. There has been no accountability for those responsible for these Safe Sport failures. And, there has been no action plan publicised to prevent this from happening again. Why?

Lack of International Matches

During Ms. Ahrens' tenure as CEO, both the MNT and the WNT have played a historically low number of international games per year. The inability to compete against international competition has hindered both teams' ability to perform at major competitions, leading to the

¹ Milkovich v Field Hockey Canada 2013 BCSC 486 [17]

<https://www.canlii.org/en/bc/bcsc/doc/2013/2013bcsc486/2013bcsc486.html>.

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https://www.fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/FHC-StratPlanDocument_Final.pdf?gl=1*yggz9*_ga*M_TUyNjY5MjQ5LjE3NDE4OTMwNTM.*_ga_EET7SN5GKF*czE3NTcwMjA4MTUkbzU5JGcxJHQxNzU3MDIxMjk4JGo1NC_RsMCRoMA.

worst defeats in FHC history. Not only have tour invitations been declined, but FHC has failed to host a senior international game since the two-game Olympic Qualifier in 2019. The lack of international preparation and competition is a primary factor in the decline of the MNT and WNT's combined 15 places in world rankings.

Finances

The MNT and WNT continue to face significant challenges in obtaining financial transparency from Ms. Ahrens, and tour fees have disproportionately skyrocketed under her leadership. In 2022, tour fees were reinstated for the first time since 2015 for the MNT. When asked for a breakdown of costs, Ms. Ahrens repeatedly insisted that a simple 7-10 line-item budget was not possible to produce for an international tour. Athletes have yet to receive a reconciled budget for a tour. When savings are made, there is no clarity on how those funds are reallocated. To offset the cost of tours, the MNT and WNT have repeatedly urged FHC leadership to prioritise locating corporate sponsorship opportunities. Since she was appointed CEO, Ms. Ahrens has failed to secure a single jersey sponsorship or corporate backing. The limited sponsorships acquired have been through player-led initiatives. Currently, the MNT is the only team in the top 20 world rankings without a jersey sponsor, and the WNT are one of a few in the top 25 without a jersey sponsor. Increasing the number of income-generating sponsorships is a key outcome of the FHC 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. The failure to secure any sort of financial support has directly affected FHC's ability to run a high-performance program.

Staff Turnover

Organisations need consistent staffing to function properly. Since 2019, there have been five different coaches of the MNT and five different coaches of the WNT. There have been four High Performance Directors in five years. Since 2019, FHC, a small NSO with a full-time staff typically consisting of between six and eight individuals, has experienced staff turnover of at least 41 employees under Ms. Ahrens' leadership. This level of turnover reflects the culture of instability and the toxic working environment fostered under the current CEO. Under these conditions, talented and qualified staff are unwilling or unable to stay, disrupting athlete development, eroding trust in leadership, and compromising overall team performance.

Governance

FHC's governance practices demonstrate repeated failures to uphold its own bylaws, the Canada Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, the Canadian Sport Governance Code, and basic principles of

transparency. The majority of the current Board have been appointed rather than elected by members, with the CEO involved in the nomination process, which is a clear conflict of interest. The 2025 Governance Committee Report further highlights procedural errors, including the misuse of terms such as “appoint” and “recognise”, violations of director term limits, improper appointments of directors, and inaccuracies regarding Board size. These actions undermine member rights, bypass proper election processes, and erode trust in FHC’s governance.

Strategic Plan Review

The FHC 2020-2025 Strategic Plan outlined three priorities:

- Priority 1: Becoming a stronger organisation both fiscally and in governance
- Priority 2: Developing the field hockey system pathway from grassroots to high performance
- Priority 3: Achieving stronger international results

The continued financial and staffing instability, as well as Safe Sport failures, demonstrate a clear failure of Priority 1. We do not have the data to analyse Strategic Priority 2. Under Ms. Ahren’s tenure, heavy losses in international competition for both the MNT and WNT, as well as the JMNT and JWNT, show a clear failure of Priority 3.

Next actions

We, the MNT and WNT, believe that urgent change is required if Canada is to have any chance at success on the international stage. To this effect, we call for the following actions:

Leadership Change: immediate removal of CEO Susan Ahrens and the appointment of a CEO through an independent and transparent process.

Expectations for new leadership:

- Program Stability and Investment: Commitment to a centralised high-performance model, reduced staff turnover, and reinvestment in senior programs to restore Own The Podium funding, achieve the Weise Report target of 50% of the budget into senior international competition, and rebuild international competitiveness.
- Reassessment of Strategic Plans: The 2025-2030 strategic plan incorporates realistic expectations that meet the needs of both programs and their stakeholders.

If meaningful changes are not implemented without delay — including the immediate removal of the CEO — we are prepared to pursue further action to ensure that FHC is led with the accountability, transparency, and integrity that athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, and the entire Canadian field hockey community rightfully expect and deserve.

Detailed Analysis

Safe Sport Issues

2022 was a disastrous year for the MNT in terms of safe sport incidents. In January, the contracts of the then-coaching staff expired. Despite strong interest from those coaches to extend their contracts (individuals who went on to achieve World Cup gold and Olympic silver in the following two years), Ms. Ahrens failed to renew them. Instead, the process was drawn out for several months, creating an artificial sense of urgency to fill the role. By May 2022, with the Commonwealth Games only two months away, the MNT remained without a head coach.³

During this period, Mr. Milkovich was proposed as an interim head coach through the Commonwealth Games. Multiple warnings were issued to Ms. Ahrens regarding the risks associated with his appointment. At least three separate individuals — an FHC staff member, a concerned parent of an MNT player, and a former FHC Board member — directly advised Ms. Ahrens against hiring Mr. Milkovich because of his publicly known past history.

Despite her acknowledged concerns with his appointment, Ms. Ahrens asked the MNT athletes to write a letter to the Board in support of hiring Mr. Milkovich. The athletes sent her a letter that included the following passage:

The player group is broadly aware of Mr. Milkovich's previous relationship with FHC, including claims of harassment against him.⁴ We trust that the Board will strongly consider the specific details of this situation when deciding on his appointment, and we recommend a zero-tolerance policy for any future incidents of harassment.

Ms. Ahrens and the then-interim High-Performance Director (HPD) did not share this letter with the Board. Instead, it was shared with Mr. Milkovich—constituting a serious breach of process and trust. Mr. Milkovich proceeded to send a threatening text message to one of the players involved in drafting the letter: “unless you want to end up in court you had better re-draft that letter.” This message was immediately shared with FHC staff. A potential new coach threatening legal action against the athletes he is about to coach should have been

³ The 2022 Commonwealth Games were held from July 28, 2022 until August 8, 2022.

⁴ Milkovich v Field Hockey Canada 2013 BCSC 486 [17]

<https://www.canlii.org/en/bc/bcsc/doc/2013/2013bcsc486/2013bcsc486.html>.

extremely concerning and grounds for thorough reconsideration. Instead, Ms. Ahrens ignored the athletes' concerns, and Mr. Milkovich was hired

Furthermore, it was widely known that Mr. Milkovich was closely connected personally with the then-interim HPD—an individual whom Ms. Ahrens herself had appointed—representing a clear conflict of interest that further compromised the integrity of the hiring process.

FHC staff communicated to the players that they needed to re-draft the letter to be more supportive of Mr. Milkovich's hiring, or they would be without a coach at the 2022 Commonwealth Games. This placed the athletes in a position where they either compromise their principles and remain silent about legitimate safe sport concerns or risk being uncoached at a major international competition. These actions undermined athletes' trust and created a culture of fear where speaking up about maltreatment could directly jeopardise our ability to compete.

Despite these warnings, FHC proceeded to hire Mr. Milkovich without implementing any additional safeguards to protect athletes and staff. This decision violated the Universal Code of Conduct for Maltreatment in Sport (UCCMS)⁵ in effect at that time, which explicitly prohibited “sport administrators or other sport decision-makers in positions of authority to place participants in situations that make them vulnerable to Maltreatment [including] ... hiring a coach who has a past history of Athlete Maltreatment.” We believe there was a clear basis for a Safe Sport complaint in this regard against Ms. Ahrens and FHC— something that independent investigators suggested to several complainants.

During the Commonwealth Games, multiple individuals reported concerns about Mr. Milkovich's behaviour directly to Ms. Ahrens. His behaviour, which was perceived as maltreatment at the time and was later formally deemed maltreatment by an independent External Discipline Panel.⁶ During the games, the coach's behaviour was so egregious that a staff member who suffered from Mr. Milkovich's maltreatment contacted Ms. Ahrens to inform her of Mr. Milkovich's behaviour. Ms. Ahrens dismissed this staff member's concerns as an overreaction.

Despite being informed of the issue by several individuals, Ms. Ahrens took no action to remedy or prevent further maltreatment during the 2022 Commonwealth Games tour. Ms. Ahrens, in effect, swept the concerns under the rug.

Since the time of the incident through the filing of a complaint, the investigation process, hearings, and the final decision, Ms. Ahrens, nor anyone from FHC under her direction, has had

⁵ The Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport (UCCMS) must be adopted by all sport organisations that receive funding from the federal government

<https://sportintegritycommissioner.ca/uccms>.

⁶ <https://fieldhockey.ca/field-hockey-canada-summary-of-discipline-and-complaints-decisions/>.

any communication with the victims of the maltreatment regarding this matter, whether to express remorse, empathy, support, or otherwise. It was as though none of this had happened at FHC. The victims were left to deal with the fallout from this situation on their own and continue to be left to do so.

Publication Obligation

In April 2024, sanctions were imposed against Mr. Milkovich:

“[Mr. Milkovich] is barred from participating in any sport, in any capacity, in any program, activity, event, or competition sponsored by, organised by, or under the auspices of FHC”, and is ‘permanently ineligible from all coaching roles’.

Once the Panel’s decision was rendered and the appeal period had lapsed (May 9, 2024), FHC had several obligations under its Discipline and Complaints Policy and the UCCMS.

Section 39 of the FHC Discipline and Complaints Policy states:

“once the appeal deadline in the Appeal Policy has expired, Field Hockey Canada or the Member (as applicable) shall publish on their website the outcome of the case, the provision(s) of the relevant policies that have been violated, the name(s) of the Registered Participant(s) involved and the sanction(s) imposed, if any.”

On August 7, 2024—nearly three months after the decision was finalised, FHC finally updated its website to include a “Summary of Complaints and Decisions” (the FHC Registry). The publication of this information nearly three months after the decision was finalised — and only after the complainants twice contacted FHC to remind it of its obligation to publish the decision — does not comply with the Policy’s stipulation that the outcome shall be published “once the appeal deadline ... has expired.”

Moreover, we do not think the manner in which FHC published the decision is consistent with FHC policy. The FHC Register is buried on the FHC website, raising serious concerns about transparency and accountability. This is against the spirit of the FHC policy “to publish on its website the outcome of the case”, and shows an element of ‘cover-up’. For instance:

- The FHC Register does not appear on simple searches, such as ‘banned’ or ‘safe sport’;
- A search for ‘Milkovich’ on the FHC website produces the 2014 settlement as the first result and “Honouring the Past” as the second. The FHC Register is the third result, but does not name him directly; it only provides a link to the FHC Register; and

- There was no news release issued to announce the Panel's Decision or FHC's response to it; and
- The decision was never posted to the front page of FHC's website or on any FHC social media or media outlet

By comparison, other Canadian Sporting Organisations, such as Gymnastics Ontario, demonstrate far greater transparency in publishing discipline decisions⁷.

Dissemination Obligation

Section 41 of the FHC Discipline and Complaints Policy states that "other individuals or organisations, including but not limited to, Members, sport clubs, etc., shall be advised of the outcome of any decisions rendered in accordance with this Policy." FHC's members are the provincial sporting organisations (PSOs).⁸

We are only aware that FHC directly advised Field Hockey BC of the decision on August 21, 2024, two weeks after the FHC Register was published. This appears to have been in response to social media posts by one of the complainants that mentioned FHC's failure to advise other organisations. Field Hockey Ontario and Field Hockey Quebec learned of the decision through the community, not FHC. This lack of proactive communication demonstrates a pattern of concealment rather than transparency, and a clear breach of FHC policy.

On August 7, 2024, the MNT published a screenshot of the FHC Register (without commentary) from the FHC website on its Instagram story (@mntredcaribou). FHC staff logged into the MNT account and deleted the story. FHC staff claimed that:

"sharing the post regarding the suspension goes against common sense and Field Hockey Canada's social media guidelines, and that it brought unfortunate consequences to the organisation as a whole."

To date, no evidence of such "unfortunate consequences" has been provided. The purpose of publicising a safe sport prohibition is to inform the community so that they can be protected from maltreatment; otherwise, the entire process of adjudicating these events is meaningless. The MNT felt it appropriate to do their part in furthering the goals of Safe Sport; instead, we were threatened with sanctions by our NSO. Moreover, sharing publicly available information without commentary cannot reasonably be construed as a policy violation.

⁷ [Gymnastics Ontario Membership Suspension – John Smyth](#).

⁸ E.g. Field Hockey BC, Field Hockey Alberta, Field Hockey Quebec, and so on.

We surmise that under Ms. Ahren's further direction, FHC staff repeatedly pressured the MNT to return control of the account, copying the HPD and head coach on emails, in what players perceived as intimidation. Ms. Ahrens also required the MNT to sign a social media agreement containing a "silencing clause":

"To refrain from publishing any information commenting on FHC legal, safe sport decisions or policy matters"

These actions were only taken after the MNT sought to adequately inform the community about the outcome of the case, and they reflect a clear effort to suppress discussion and whitewash the issue. They demonstrate a pattern of cover-up, silencing and whitewashing of the issues.

In late August 2024, anticipating questions at the upcoming FHC AGM, Ms. Ahren quietly issued a statement deep on the FHC website, which included the following:

"Currently, appointments within Field Hockey Canada involve a consultation process which ensures that board, staff, and external expertise all have the opportunity to provide [sic] input into significant decisions. This includes athlete consultations with prospective coaching hires. This has extended as far as an interim appointment which included pre-appointment meetings between the athletes and the prospective coach and the team providing a letter of support. Appointments are conditional on the completion of various screening mechanisms and other requirements, including safe sport training and criminal record checks.

On occasion, even with significant measures in place, incidents where certain Field Hockey Canada participants fail to meet the standards and expectations of the organisation do unfortunately occur. When these issues arise, Field Hockey Canada assures our community that action is taken in accordance with our policies...

To advance our collective efforts, we will be forming a Safe Sport working group in the coming weeks to consider how to best ensure alignment of Sport Safety policies and processes throughout the Canadian field hockey ecosystem.

We have also requested that OSIC conduct a Sport Environment Assessment to assist us with identifying areas of improvement as an organisation and sport."

At the 2024 AGM, Ms. Ahrens referenced this statement but provided no substantive answers to PSOs' concerns. Ms. Ahrens said this working group would be created to address the sort of questions and criticisms the PSOs had. To this date, no such working group has been created, no Sport Environment Assessment by the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner (OSIC) has been shared, and the statement itself has since been removed from FHC's website. These actions suggest that the statement was intended as a deflection rather than a genuine reform.

In October 2024, the Chair of FHC issued a letter in response to an internal letter sent by the complainants, stating that hiring Mr. Milkovich was supported and approved by the team. This could not be more misleading. The team's letter of "support" was rewritten under coercion: athletes were told they would otherwise be left without a coach at a major competition. To say that the team supported and approved this hire is disingenuous, considering the team was forced to amend the letter to make it more supportive lest we lose the chance to compete at a Major Competition. Either the Chair was being disingenuous, or Ms. Ahrens failed to report the circumstances truthfully. In either case, the obligation is on FHC leadership to protect players—not require them to protect themselves, as requiring players to protect themselves is not an adequate safe sport procedure.

When FHC signed on to Abuse-Free Sport, Ms. Ahrens' press release included the following statement: "Field Hockey Canada recognises that safe sport is everyone's responsibility. We're fully committed to doing our part to support a growing national movement that is changing the culture of sport in this country."⁹ The treatment afforded to the MNT does not match the idyllic view of the changing culture of sport in Canada. In fact, Ms. Ahrens' comments are galling to the MNT and others affected by Mr. Milkovich's maltreatment because they are patently unsubstantiated by her conduct throughout the spring and summer of 2022, and continue to this day. It is quite astonishing that Ms. Ahrens faced no repercussions for her conduct in ignoring the warnings of others, which directly resulted in serious consequences for FHC athletes and staff. One wonders how any CEO in any organisation could continue in their role after demonstrating carelessness at best and patent negligence at worst, as seen in the CEO of FHC throughout this Safe Sport incident.

Two quotes from the Future of Sport in Canada Commission's Preliminary Report, released on August 28, 2025:¹⁰

- "Canadian sport has lost its way. This was most dramatically evidenced by the horrific instances of abuse and maltreatment that have come to light, *many of which were swept under the rug as a result of a lack of leadership.*"
- "A culture of silence exacerbates maltreatment in sport."

⁹ <https://fieldhockey.ca/field-hockey-canada-joins-abuse-free-sport/>.

¹⁰

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pch/documents/campaigns/future-sport/future-sport-canada-commission-report-eng.pdf> [12], [214].

Lack of International Matches

Ms. Ahrens was appointed CEO of FHC in March 2019, inheriting an MNT ranked 10th in the world and a WNT ranked 15th in the world. Shortly after Ms. Ahrens became CEO in 2019, she wrote that the “national teams are strongly positioned for future international success.”¹¹ The MNT’s full-time, Vancouver-based DTE, in combination with select players playing overseas, resulted in Olympic qualification in 2016, World Cup qualification in 2018, Olympic qualification in 2020, and a 10th-place ranking. The WNT was on the rise in the world rankings, winning a silver medal at the 2019 Pan American Games for the first time since 1991 and just one shootout goal away from Olympic qualification.

In the lead-up to qualifying for back-to-back Olympic Games, the MNT played the following number of international games:

- *London 2012 - Rio 2016*
 - 2013: 16
 - 2014: 32
 - 2015: 35
 - Total: 83 (all with the same head coach)
 - Result: qualified for the Olympics

- *Rio 2016 - Tokyo 2020*
 - 2017: 21
 - 2018: 35 (World Cup)
 - 2019: 23
 - Total: 79 (all but 6 with the same head coach)
 - Result: qualified for the Olympics

Under Ms. Ahrens' first 4-year quad as CEO, the MNT played the following number of international games in the lead-up to Olympic qualification:

- *Tokyo 2020 - Paris 2024*
 - 2021: COVID/postponed Olympics year
 - 2022: 18, with three different coaches

¹¹[https://www.fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FHC-StratPlanDocument .pdf?_ga=1*t852xf*_ga*MTUyNjY5MjQ5LjE3NDE4OTMwNTM.*_ga_EET7SN5GKF*czE3NTcwNjE0OTkkbzYwJGcxJHQxNzU3MDYzNzU5JGo1NSRsMCRoMA](https://www.fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FHC-StratPlanDocument.pdf?_ga=1*t852xf*_ga*MTUyNjY5MjQ5LjE3NDE4OTMwNTM.*_ga_EET7SN5GKF*czE3NTcwNjE0OTkkbzYwJGcxJHQxNzU3MDYzNzU5JGo1NSRsMCRoMA).

- Note: the MNT were invited to participate in the FIH Pro-League, which would have resulted in 18 games against the top 9 teams in the world. FHC declined the invitation.
 - Note: the MNT were invited to participate in the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup in Malaysia. FHC declined the invitation.
 - 2023: 10
 - Proposed Europe tours cancelled
 - 2024: 5
 - Total: 33 (only 20 with our current coach)
 - Result: did not qualify
- *Paris 2024 - LA 2028*
 - 2025: 4 (bronze finish at PAC, MNT's worst loss to Argentina in FHC history)
 - Proposed Europe tour, Uruguay, and South Africa tours cancelled
 - Note: the MNT were invited to participate in the Nations Cup 2 tournament. FHC declined the invitation.

Under Ms. Ahrens' first 4-year quad as CEO, the WNT played the following number of international games in the lead-up to Olympic qualification:

- *Rio 2016 - Tokyo 2020*
 - 2017: 14
 - 2018: 32
 - 2019: 29
 - Total: 75
 - Result: Very narrowly missed out on qualification in a shootout
- *Tokyo 2020 - Paris 2024*
 - 2021: COVID year
 - 2022: 16
 - 2023: 7
 - 2024: 12
 - Total: 35
 - Result: did not qualify
- *Paris 2024 - LA 2028*
 - 2025: 10 (failed to make the PAC semi-finals)

Under Ms. Ahrens' leadership, the MNT and WNT have played *significantly* fewer games. The MNT failed to qualify for a Pan American final for the first, second, and third times in 51 years, as well as for the World Cup and the Olympics (for the first time since 2012). The WNT failed to make the Pan American Cup semi-finals for only the second time in tournament history. The MNT's world ranking has dropped to 20th - *the worst historical ranking to date*. In the lead-up to the 2025 Pan American Cup, the MNT had not played a single international match in over 13 months. This complete lack of preparation contributed to the MNT's heaviest-ever defeat against Argentina in a Pan American tournament and another missed finals appearance. The World Cup qualifier is scheduled for March 2026, yet no international matches are planned before this qualifier in 2026. Without regular international competition, how can the MNT and WNT be expected to perform at the required level and secure qualification?

To further emphasise Ms. Ahrens' inability to provide international match opportunities for the MNT and WNT, FHC has yet to host senior international games since the MNT's Olympic Qualifier in October 2019—an event that was mandatory to host according to the FIH Olympic qualification process. The men's team has not hosted a competition since 2018, when China and a young Pakistan team were invited for a series.

However, the narrative of games on home soil is broadcast differently by Ms. Ahrens. For example, in FHC's July 18, 2024, news article, FHC writes, "Canada's rich hosting history, showcasing the country's commitment to developing field hockey and providing its athletes with world-class opportunities".¹² How can there be a rich hosting legacy when there has been a gap of over six years since Canada last hosted an outdoor senior event? Ms. Ahrens has yet to initiate or host a single international competition for either the MNT or WNT since being hired. Such competition ought to be paramount to satisfy FHC's commitment to senior national teams.

The lack of international matches under Ms. Ahrens' tenure means the amount of "world-class competition opportunities" drastically falls short of meeting the recommendations found in the 2020 Wise Report, the targets of FHC's Strategic Plan document (2020- 2025), and FHC's 2016 Competitions Review with respect to hosting major competitions yearly for Canada's Senior National teams. In essence, to state that FHC "provides its athletes with world-class competitions" is misleading and disingenuous. There is no yearly hosting of competition for both the MNT and WNT. The MNT and WNT have lost significant world rankings over the past 5 years, and a lack of international preparation and competition is a primary factor.

¹² <https://fieldhockey.ca/junior-pan-american-championships-reflections/>.

Finances

From 2013 to 2015, the MNT received no funding from Own The Podium, yet leadership successfully secured an average of 27.67 international games per year. During this period, tour fees averaged approximately \$5,000 per athlete annually, or \$1,000 per tour. Under Ms. Ahren's leadership, the costs have skyrocketed notwithstanding inflation. In 2025, the MNT will play only 10 games, with tour fees estimated at \$8,000 per athlete—equivalent to \$4,000 per tour. In 2025, the WNT will also only play nine games at \$8,000 per athlete.¹³ Looking ahead, 2026 appears to be no different; tour fees are expected to be tens of thousands of dollars per athlete, with only a limited number of games scheduled.

Currently, there is no viable plan to reduce or eliminate these fees and to ensure 25+ international matches per year. Ms. Ahrens has even repeatedly attempted to use Sport Canada Athlete Assistance Program funds (also known as 'carding'), which is a personal living and training allowance, as a line item in program and tour budgets.¹⁴ This directly violates Sport Canada's policy, which explicitly states:

"The AAP financial assistance...is intended to offset some, but not all, of the living and training expenses athletes incur..."¹⁵

Ms. Ahrens' attempts to use the athletes' carding money as a stopgap measure or a "quick fix" to cover funding shortfalls, rather than developing sustainable external funding strategies. Athletes are repeatedly told they must "buy into" the program, yet many rely on the AAP support for essential living expenses and cannot afford to redirect it toward tour fees and FHC levies. Ultimately, Sport Canada's policy does not stipulate the use of the athletes' carding as a line item in tour and program budgets. However, Ms. Ahrens has repeatedly attempted to do so.

The 2020 Weise Report (commissioned by Ms. Ahrens) concluded that the "HP budget needs to invest in players / HP learning through quality competitive experiences. At least 50% of the budget into competition."¹⁶ Ms. Ahrens has failed to meet this standard, and in some years, has allocated as little as 15% of the budget to competition. Further, the Strategic Plan document states that "multi-year partnerships [will] be in place by 2021" and "diverse revenue streams in

¹³ This amount was reduced after a last-minute private donation secured by WNT athletes.

¹⁴ This was done as recently as August 26, 2025 at a Zoom meeting with the Athlete Council.

¹⁵ <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/athlete-assistance/policies-procedures.html>. Section 1.1.

¹⁶ <https://fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/HP-System-Review-2020.pdf>.

place by 2024.”¹⁷ Has this occurred? If yes, why aren’t these funds being directed to help fund senior international competition?

The MNT and WNT continue to face significant challenges in obtaining financial transparency from Ms. Ahrens. For example, in 2022, Ms. Ahrens repeatedly insisted that a simple 7-10 line-item budget was not possible to produce for an international tour. Athletes never receive a reconciled budget, and when savings are made, there is no clarity on how those funds are reallocated. Where does the leftover contingency go? What happens to the saved money? This lack of transparency further breaks athlete trust and raises concerns about fiscal accountability within FHC.

Most National Sport Organisations (NSOs) across Canada, as well as other international hockey nations, have visible corporate jersey sponsorships that directly help to offset tour and program budgets. During Ms. Ahren’s tenure at FHC, she has failed to acquire a single jersey sponsorship or major corporate sponsor. The MNT is the only nation in the top 20 without a jersey sponsor and/or sponsors, and one of the few nations without significant corporate backing. The limited jersey sponsors previously obtained by the MNT (e.g., RBC, Frontline Crossings) were entirely player-driven, achieved through personal connections of current or former athletes.

Despite repeated calls from athletes to prioritise this area, FHC, under Ms. Ahrens, has failed to deliver a single sponsorship deal. Without sustainable funding from corporate partners, it is nearly impossible to establish a successful high-performance program. This is a failure of The Strategic Plan 2020-2025, which stipulated “diverse revenue streams in place by 2024.”¹⁸

FHC’s Sport Canada core funding has historically been around \$400,000 per year. This past year, funding has increased to approximately \$700,000. However, tour fees remain at an all-time high, while the number of international games played is at an all-time low. There has been no transparency on where this increased funding has been invested. Are the senior national team programs at FHC the priority for the current CEO?

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https://www.fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/FHC-StratPlanDocument_Final.pdf?_gl=1*cjfy5x*_ga*M_TUyNjY5MjQ5LjE3NDE4OTMwNTM.*_ga_EET7SN5GKF*czE3NTcwMTQyNTAkczU4JGcxJHOxNzU3MDE1MzY3JGo2MCRsMCRoMA.

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https://www.fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/FHC-StratPlanDocument_Final.pdf?_gl=1*cjfy5x*_ga*M_TUyNjY5MjQ5LjE3NDE4OTMwNTM.*_ga_EET7SN5GKF*czE3NTcwMTQyNTAkczU4JGcxJHOxNzU3MDE1MzY3JGo2MCRsMCRoMA.

Staff Turnover

Consistency of staffing at all levels is another key element of a properly functioning organisation. The Weise Report highlighted this, stating: *“A podium in 2028 is possible if this all happens now [2020]. Find and sign quality people who serve the system first and make it stronger. These people need to buy in for 8-10 years minimum.”*

This has not been the case. Since 2019, there have been 28 different directors on the board—why have so many resigned? Since 2019, there have been five coaches of the MNT and five coaches of the WNT. There have been four HPDs in five years. Since 2019, there has been a staff turnover of at least 41 employees, 31 of whom were hired by Ms. Ahrens. Why have so many left or not been retained? Considering FHC is a small NSO with a full-time staff typically between six and eight individuals, this level of turnover is not coincidental. It reflects the culture of instability and a toxic working environment fostered under the current CEO. Under these conditions, talented and qualified staff are unwilling or unable to stay, disrupting athlete development, eroding trust in leadership, and compromising overall team performance.

Field Hockey Canada has not secured the long-term commitment of quality personnel, and without this stability, the likelihood of qualifying for the 2028 Olympics—let alone reaching the podium—is extremely low.

Poor Governance

One of the most fundamental governance powers of members of a National Sports Organisation, such as FHC, is the ability to elect directors. Directors manage the organisation’s affairs, and it is the members (PSOs) who are responsible for choosing them.

Separation of the Board and the CEO

The current Board comprises nine individuals, but only four of them have been elected by the members. The Board itself appointed three of the remaining directors, and we have found no evidence of appointment for the other two remaining directors. In any event, all five of these individuals would be up for proper election by the members at the 2025 Annual Meeting.

The nomination process rests solely with the Governance Committee, composed of two directors and the CEO, Ms. Ahrens (as a non-voting member, but a member nonetheless).¹⁹ The

¹⁹ <https://fieldhockey.ca/about-us/governance/committees/>.

CEO's involvement in selecting potential directors represents a clear self-serving conflict of interest (choosing one's own boss) and undermines the principle of independent governance.²⁰ This structure is inconsistent with best practices and violates FHC's own Terms of Reference (which require three directors, not two), and the Canadian Sport Governance Code (which requires an odd number of members).²¹ What is the use of having policies in place and then not following them?

The 2020 Weise Report states that "as long as Field Hockey Canada is failing to provide high-performance governance structures and leadership... success in absolute terms (winning medals) will not come. Guaranteed."²² This statement applies equally to corporate governance and is even more relevant today.

The next part of this section discusses procedural failures for Board nominees. We do not comment on their abilities or merits, nor do we suggest whether they should or should not be on the Board. Our sole purpose is to highlight flawed and erroneous processes.

The 2025 Governance Committee Report itself highlights several serious procedural failures:²³

Incorrect Use of Terminology

The proposed 'MOTIONS' in the Governance Committee Report in respect of directors use the words "appoint" and "recognise". These are incorrect. As per FHC Bylaw 10.1²⁴ and subsection 128(3) of the Canada Not-for-Profit Corporations Act²⁵, directors are elected by the members, not appointed or recognised.

Lack of Justification for Nominees

FHC Bylaw 14.3 requires the Governance Committee to propose a slate of nominations for the Board, which would include these five individuals.²⁶ This Report should include an explanation

²⁰ "It is critical to ensure a clear separation between the CEO and the Chair of the Board", Anne Corbett & James M Mackay, *Guide to Good Governance: Not-for-Profit and Charitable Organisations*, 2nd ed (September 2013) at 157; This was also cited by The Honourable Thomas Cromwell, C.C. in his Final Report, *Hockey Canada Governance Review* in 2022.

²¹

²² <https://fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/HP-System-Review-2020.pdf>.

²³ <https://fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Governance-Report-AGM-2025.pdf>.

²⁴

https://www.fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/Policies/Bylaws%20of%20Field%20Hockey%20Canada.pdf?_gl=1*1kl8lah*_ga*MTUyNjY5MjQ5LjE3NDE4OTMwNTM.*_ga_EET7SN5GKF*czE3NTcwMTQyNTAkzU4JGcxJHQxNzU3MDE2OTY1JGo2MCRsMCRoMA.

²⁵ [Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act \(SC 2009, c. 23\)](#).

²⁶

https://www.fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/Policies/Bylaws%20of%20Field%20Hockey%20Canada.pdf?_gl=1*1kl8lah*_ga*MTUyNjY5MjQ5LjE3NDE4OTMwNTM.*_ga_EET7SN5GKF*czE3NTcwMTQyNTAkzU4JGcxJHQxNzU3MDE2OTY1JGo2MCRsMCRoMA

of why the Governance Committee recommends that the members elect these nominees as directors. This Report does not make any specific recommendations about each nominee, but only includes some very general statements about filling skills gaps and diversity balance.

Violation of Term Limits

There is a motion to appoint (it should be 'elect') an existing director to the Board as a Director-at-Large for a 3rd consecutive term. FHC Bylaw 10.3 clearly limits directors to not more than two consecutive terms on the basis of the same election or appointment. This proposal clearly violates Bylaw 10.3. Simply stating that "a new election and appointment" satisfies FHC Bylaw 10.3 does not make it so, or else there would never be a limit on the number of terms, and FHC Bylaw 10.3 would have no effect whatsoever. Should FHC wish to appoint an existing director to a third term, the correct procedures should be followed (which is to amend the Bylaws by following the correct procedures).

Rejection of Valid Nominations

The Report states that no nominations were received during the nomination period. This is incorrect. We are aware that an additional nomination was received in October 2024, which had the required PSO support but was rejected by the Governance Committee in November 2024; therefore, it was neither considered by the Board nor by the members.

Improper Appointments

Three Directors-at-Large have not been elected to the Board by FHC's members. They were appointed, not elected, by the Board on December 15, 2024.²⁷ This was done so ostensibly pursuant to FHC Bylaw 10.2, and will be discussed shortly.²⁸ The current athlete directors have not been elected by members.²⁹ From a review of the minutes of Board meetings held since the

[j7zzy*_ga*MTg0NjE1Nzk0MS4xNzUxNjO4OTA4*_ga_FET7SN5GKF*cze3NTU4MDA3OTkkbzQwJGcxJHOxNzU1ODAyMDQ0JGo0OSRsMCRoMA.](https://fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/06-December-15th-2024_approved-minutes-2.pdf)

²⁷ https://fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/06-December-15th-2024_approved-minutes-2.pdf. page 2.

²⁸

https://www.fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/Policies/Bylaws%20of%20Field%20Hockey%20Canada.pdf?_gl=1*fzoi4h*_ga*MTUyNjY5Mj05LjE3NDF4OTMwNTM.*_ga_FET7SN5GKF*cze3NTYzNDQwMzAkczQwJGcxJHOxNzU2MzQ0MDQzJGo0NyRsMCRoMA. page 5.

²⁹ A review of the 2024 AGM draft minutes shows that the previous athlete directors were re-elected at the 2024 AGM <https://fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/2024-FHC-AGM-Draft-Minutes.pdf>.

2024 AGM (September 2024), it appears they were never appointed by the Board pursuant to FHC Bylaw 10.2.³⁰ Therefore, these five individuals are up for election at the 2025 AGM.

Incorrect Board Size

The Report notes that three vacancies remain on the Board at the 2025 AGM. This is incorrect. Section 5 of FHC's Articles of Continuance states that the maximum number of directors is 11. Therefore, there are only two remaining positions on the Board. However, we have procedural concerns with the 'appointment' of three directors on December 15, 2024, and the two athlete directors (hence the use of the word 'ostensibly' earlier).

FHC's Bylaws state that members must elect the Board of Directors. The Board can only fill 'vacancies' until the next AGM. At the 2024 AGM, the members elected five directors, and the term of the sixth director had not yet ended. The 2024 AGM Draft Minutes concluded that the "board will comprise 6 directors", effectively setting the number of directors on the Board at six.³¹ The remaining five spots are not 'vacancies', they are 'additional directors'. A vacancy would occur if one of those six directors resigned, died, or was removed pursuant to subsection 126(1) or 130(1) of the Canada Not-for-Profit Corporations Act. Only then does Bylaw 10.2 have effect, in which the Board would have the ability to fill that vacancy until the next AGM by 'appointing' a director. Under subsection 128(8) of the Canada Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, the Board may increase their size and add 'additional directors' if that power exists in FHC's Articles and the size is limited to a one-third increase. FHC's Articles do not contain this power. Even if the articles did contain that power, a one-third increase of five directors limits the addition of directors to one more, totalling seven. Given that FHC's articles do not contain such power, FHC had no authority to 'appoint' the three directors to the Board on December 15, 2024. Additionally, according to the Board meeting archives, the resignation of the former athlete directors and the appointment of the new athlete directors were improperly conducted. Technically, it never occurred. There is no record of their resignation, nor is there a record of the appointment of the current athlete directors.

³⁰ <https://fieldhockey.ca/board-meeting-archives/>.

³¹ <https://fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2024-FHC-AGM-Draft-Minutes-1.pdf>.

Analysis of the 2020 - 2025 Strategic Plan

Strategic Priority 1: Become a stronger organisation

This priority emphasised building a financially stable organisation supported by strong governance. However, as outlined above, FHC continues to face significant financial instability, governance failures, and unresolved issues related to safe sport. On these grounds, Strategic Priority 1 must be regarded as a clear failure.

Strategic Priority 2: A stronger system

This priority outlined an increase in participation numbers nationwide, as well as improvements in player, coach, and umpire pathways. In our opinion, there have been improvements to the player pathway, particularly in Atlantic Canada and within the Master's program. However, the MNT and WNT lack the necessary data and evidence to analyse Strategic Priority 2 sufficiently.

Strategic Priority 3: Stronger International Performance

Strategic Priority 3 was to have stronger international performance for the MNT and WNT, as well as the JMNT and JWNT. As detailed above, the performance of both the MNT and the WNT has led to the MNT dropping from 10th to 20th and the WNT from 15th to 20th in the world ranking.

While the 2025 Chair's Report optimistically claimed that "The [Junior National Teams] program continues to grow and thrive"³², the evidence does not support this view. While some teams advanced through qualification tournaments, these results were often due to expanded qualification spots rather than competitive strength and results.

U21 Men's National Team Results:

- *Pan Am Tournaments (vs. Argentina gold medal match):*
 - 2012: 3-2 Loss
 - 2016: 5-0 Loss
 - 2021: Did not qualify for the final (finished 4th)
 - 2023: 6-1 Loss
 - 2024: 10-0 Loss

- *U21 World Cup Results:*

³² https://fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Chairs-Report-Aug_2025.pdf.

- 2013: last place (16th), goal differential -15
- 2016: last place (16th), goal differential -14
- 2021: 13th place, goal differential -22
- 2023: last place (16th), goal differential -34

U21 Women's National Team Results

- *Pan Am Tournaments:*
 - 2012: 2nd place
 - 2016: 4th place
 - 2021: Champions
 - 2023: 4th place
 - 2024: 5th place
- *U21 World Cup Results:*
 - 2013: 14th place, goal differential -5
 - 2016: did not qualify
 - 2022: last place (15th), goal differential -24
 - 2023: last place (16th), goal differential -38

These results indicate a clear regression over time, rather than progress.

Failing to invest in the senior national programs has led to a major funder, Own The Podium (OTP), cutting funding for both national teams to zero, citing a lack of successful programs. This demonstrates that OTP does not believe in the current direction of the programs.

The Strategic Priority 3 set ambitious targets:

- Both Senior National Teams (MNT and WNT) are to achieve a top-8 finish at the 2024 Olympics
 - Neither team qualified, nor were they realistically close to qualifying
- Both U21 teams to secure top-8 finishes at the U21 World Cups
 - Neither team came close.
- The MNT and WNT also dropped significantly in the world rankings

Strategic Priority 3 has been an obvious failure.

Lack of Transparency and Self-Reflection

Upon reviewing the 2024 Annual Report, one would be led to believe that the organisation is thriving. Ms. Ahrens wrote:

“As I read our committee and staff annual reports, I am impressed by the outcomes and outputs we have achieved together in this reporting period. These extend both on the field of play and behind the scenes to ensure the growth and development of the sport across the country.”³³

This narrative contrasts sharply with the actual results and experiences of the athletes. The Strategic Plan itself pledged: *“We commit to being realistic about our capabilities and honest about what we are capable of, and what we are not.”*

The Chair is inaccurate when he says, “[FHC is] in a good place,”³⁴ which leads to the question: why is Ms. Ahrens not honest with FHC and with the broader field hockey community?

Decentralisation of the MNT Program

Ms. Ahrens’ proposed next step for the Men’s National Team (MNT) is to decentralise the program. The last time this model was attempted was before the 2022 Pan American Cup. Under that structure, athletes had minimal time with the coaching staff on the field before the tournament. The outcome was a historic failure to qualify for the Pan Am Cup final for the first time in 51 years, which in turn meant missing out on qualifying for the World Cup.

Decentralising again would be disastrous for our program. The rationale appears to be primarily cost-cutting, but the risks to athlete development and performance far outweigh any short-term financial savings.

Canada lacks the necessary club infrastructure to support a decentralised model. Most domestic club teams train only once per week, and even the strongest league in the country—the Vancouver Men’s Field Hockey League (VMFHL)—is entirely insufficient for preparing athletes for international competition.

A daily training environment (DTE) is not optimal; it is essential. It has been a proven cornerstone of success, enabling the MNT to qualify for multiple consecutive World Cups and Olympic Games. Removing the DTE would strip athletes of the high-performance environment required to remain competitive internationally, leading to further regression in results and standings.

³³ <https://fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/FHC-2024-ANNUAL-REPORT-FINAL-DRAFT.pdf>.

³⁴ https://fieldhockey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Chairs-Report-Aug_2025.pdf.

Values and Principles

The 2020-2025 Strategic Plan outlined six values to guide FHC: integrity, fun, accountability, teamwork, respect, and transparency. Unfortunately, many of these values have not been upheld under Ms. Ahrens' leadership.

Based on our detailed analysis of each area of concern in this letter, Ms. Ahrens has not demonstrated transparency, accountability, or integrity. Despite FHC's pledge to "*be honest, even if the truth is tough,*" honesty has been noticeably absent.

Conclusion

We, the MNT and WNT, believe that FHC is an organisation with immense potential. However, it is crucial that leadership upholds the values of FHC to assist the players in our efforts to compete in international competition. Safe sport failures, a lack of transparency, financial mismanagement, unstable staffing, poor governance, and declining international performance all point to systemic issues that can no longer be ignored.

We call on the Board of Directors to take immediate action to restore credibility, accountability, and stability within FHC, including the removal of CEO Susan Ahrens and the appointment of a new CEO through an independent and transparent process.

Expectations for new leadership:

- Program Stability and Investment: Commitment to a centralised high-performance model, reduced staff turnover, and reinvestment in senior programs to restore Own The Podium funding, achieve the Weise Report target of 50% of the budget into senior international competition, and rebuild international competitiveness.
- Reassessment of Strategic Plans: The 2025-2030 strategic plan is revised with more realistic expectations that meet the needs of both programs

If meaningful changes are not implemented without delay — including the immediate removal of the CEO — we are prepared to pursue further action to ensure that FHC is led with the accountability, transparency, and integrity that athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, and the entire Canadian field hockey community rightfully expect and deserve.

Signed,

The Canadian Men's and Women's Senior National Field Hockey Teams