



Dear fencers, coaches, parents, referees, and club members:

After nearly a year of deliberation and coordination, we proudly introduce you Fair Fencing Organization (FFO), a non-profit organization founded by fencers, parents, coaches, referees, and the people who love the sport. FFO is a national platform of open communication and mutual understanding for all stakeholders in the fencing community and a watchdog for the fairness, transparency, professionalism, and safety of the sport.

We are first-generation immigrants, so as most of our board members in the organization. We came to this country knowing America is a land of freedom and personal liberty. It values fairness, meritocracy and equality so that many of our immigrants with almost nothing when coming to this country had an opportunity to succeed and achieve American dream. We are not alone in the fencing community. Many fencing parents, coaches, referees, even club owners are immigrants also. All of us, whether were born in this country or immigrated to America, are gathering here today because we, our children or our students love fencing.

Fencing is an undervalued sport in the US. Most of media coverage are focused on Football, basketball, baseball, golf, tennis, etc. Our young fencers, generation after generation, work relentlessly every day on the sport not for getting rich by playing in the pro team, nor for being famous on the national TV, but for the love and the passion for fencing. Young fencers' parents, continuously spent their hard-earned money in financing the sport, not because they don't know the fiscal reality of how expensive fencing can be, but because they know the sport can help their children build strength and character, physically and mentally, be a team player and a team leader, go to a good school, which will all benefit the children in the long run.

Fencing though still a niche sport in the US, has boomed in the recent decade. Thanks to the parents who have brought in new fencers into the sport every year. In this fencing circle, we have many stakeholders, fencers, parents, referees, coaches, clubs, vendors, and the National Governing Body (USA Fencing Association). One thing I want to clearly point out: The fencers who compete in the sport, the coaches who dedicate themselves in teaching the fencers, and the parents who provide the financial support for the sport are the cornerstones of the business. All the other stakeholders are working to help, facilitate and service them in the ecosystem. Any misunderstanding on this will lead to a very different perspective on the reality. Parents are not just spectators; they are the financial backbone of the industry.

For most fencing families, the only visible gain of doing fencing is probably the college recruiting. Parents want their children to get into a better college or university with fencing

where the children may not be able to go without. This is an open secret but also an undeniable fact. The NCAA fencing teams now have probably the best college fencing teams in the world. Furthermore, our fencers who compete in the NCAA college games have the highest GPA among all NCAA sport teams. We are proud of what those fencers have achieved both athletically and academically. However, with the fencers are now tripled comparing to a decade ago, the universities that have fencing teams have not increased, if not decreased overall. With so many excellent fencers are now graduating from high schools each year, we should expand the NCAA varsity fencing team to more colleges and universities. This is the number one mission that Fair Fencing Organization will be devoted to. We certainly hope this is the number one priority for USA Fencing as well.

Besides the fencers, our fencing community never short of capable people. Many of the parents are subject experts in their own fields, some with strong alumni connections with the universities, and some with financial resources that may be crucial for a school to set up a fencing team. Many of our coaches are very experienced and have trained the fencers all the way to the Olympics. Many of our referees have highest referee credentials in the US and some are FIE certified. Many club owners who are former or current coaches, or even parents, are playing a vital role in bringing young kids into the sport of fencing. We have vast resources in our fencing network. FFO would like to become such a platform of education, communication, cooperation, and mutual understanding for all stakeholders. After its debut less than one month ago, FFO has successfully conducted a college athlete recruiting seminar, a legal education seminar, and a tournament preparation seminar. We are going to have many similar events to promote NCAA fencing teams, discuss the techniques and rules for each weapon, discover how referees are looking for from the fencers in order to make a call, and much more.

Fencing in the United States is on an upward trend in the recent years, with the number of young athletes participating in the sport growing rapidly and our fencers achieving impressive results on the international stage. USA Fencing Association, from an organization with only a few hundred members forty years ago, has now grown to over 40,000-member strong. USFA has done a great deal of work bringing the sport to the current level. However, despite its success, the growing pain has inevitably arisen with USFA and the industry, from its policy and governance, to the technology and the training. That is another reason why we founded Fair Fencing Organization. With the solid foundational support of our members, we position ourselves as a watchdog for the industry. Meanwhile, we still hope to work with USFA in a mutually cooperative manner to promote the sport. As our slogan on the website states: We strive to improve fairness, transparency, professionalism, and safety in Fencing. They are not hollow words. Those words have meanings. Now let's elaborate them.

1) Fairness

Under the current leadership, USFA has become an organization with a strong political attachment. USFA announced a policy that it will prioritize the states supporting women's abortion rights for the NAC locations. This essentially means USFA will primarily host NACs in the Coastal states. Families who have participated in the NACs all know that it is more expensive to run and attend NACs in the Coastal states than in the central region of the country. It adds more time and financial burden to literally everyone who does not live in the region. The direct flight across the continent takes 6-7 hours, not to mention often it requires a connecting flight. Is such a policy fair to the fencers and fencing families? USFA is not a political organization. Is it fair to put the political preference of some policy makers above the interests of vast majority of the fencing community? For most of the fencing families, safe and convenient location, well maintained venue facility, and affordable pricing are what they concern the most with a tournament city. USA Fencing is a sport organization. While its management is making its position clear in the domestic political debate, it should nevertheless focus on its primary mission in its operations - promoting the fencing sport and running the tournaments.

Fencing should be open to everyone regardless of age, gender, or race, but the competition should be fair. USFA's transgender policy totally disregards the fact that biological males already gain physical advantages during and after puberty. USFA's categorical allowances of transgender-women to women fencing based on the former's self-identification is not only unfair to biological women athletes but also unfair to true transgender women who have endured great many efforts to make the transition. For example, under USFA's current rules, a self-declared transgender women can compete in the Cadet level or lower at will for any given season. Literally, a biological male fencer can simply register as a transgender to compete in women fencing for one season, and change back to compete in the fencer's biological sex the next year. Anyone who has watched fencing in NAC can tell you how faster and stronger 16-year-old boys are comparing to the same aged girls. Is such an unthoughtful and capricious policy really geared to protect transgender and women athletes, to promote more women and transgender to participate in the sports? Or it merely a statement for a politically show, while no true fairness is being considered for either transgender or woman fencers?

Some USFA Access Members may have noticed that in the past couple of months the USFA website has changed multiple times back and forth regarding Access Members' voting rights. It went from Access Members having the voting rights, to only Competitive Members having the voting rights, now back to Access Members having the voting rights. The right to vote is one of the fundamental rights as USFA members. It is the financial contribution of USFA members that keeps USA Fencing in operation. Any attempt to abolish member's voting rights is not only unfair but also a breach of membership agreement between USFA and its Access Members.

2) Transparency

USFA bylaw is a lengthy document but with a lot of ambiguity. There are over twenty committees and councils like Nomination Committee, Referee Committee, Election Committee, Athlete Council, etc. How are these committees/councils created, how do they operate, whom do they report to? What are the criteria used by Nomination Committee to recommend a board member candidate? As USFA members, we know little about them. How are the USFA policy made and who is responsible for approving them? When was the last time you saw a financial report from USFA on its operations? In a sense, USA Fencing is a non-profit organization “owned” by all its members, similar to the Homeowner Association in our residential community. We expect transparency in its board candidate’s selection, transparency in its organizational structure, and transparency in its policy making.

3) Professionalism

The experience and quality of the referees have long been a major concern for our fencers, coaches, and fencing parents. Fencing (particularly foil and saber) is a sport where referees play a large role in the result of the game. Athletes must respect the authority of referees in the field and understand that even the best referees can make mistakes. It is the professional requirement for the athletes to show respect to the referee and the opponent, and accept the result of the game. On the other hand, fencers hope that the referees (especially NAC referees) have considerable professionalism and experience, and that they can continue to learn and improve their refereeing skills through the tournaments. Therefore, we are developing a system that allows contestants to upload video clips of their own bouts using their mobile phones or computers after the game, and senior referees at national or FIE level will perform a video review. This system will be launched on our Fairfencing.org website in a few months. This video review is not attempting to challenge the outcome of the game. The review and comments provided by senior referees will help the fencers know whether the referee's call at the time was correct or not, and what the actions were. If permitted by the contestant, we will share the review results with the referees of the game, and/or publish to the entire Fair Fencing community. It is a tool for both the referees and fencers to improve their professional skills.

4) Safety

We support the U.S. Center for Safe Sport and SafeSport Code. Only by providing a safe training and competition environment for athletes (especially young athletes) can athletes and parents engage in and support this sport with a peace of mind. The vast majority of fencing clubs and coaches in the U.S. support and abide by these safety regulations. We are going to invite the US Center for Safe Sport to conduct a SafeSport training for the Fencing community. However, following the US Center for Safe Sport Code does not mean that someone can punish parents, coaches and clubs without investigation. There are clear legal

boundaries and due process required. Fair Fencing Organization with a strong legal team, will continuously provide our members with legal education in this area and provide legal consultation depending on the situation.

We joined the USA Fencing because we, our children, or our students love the sport. We need an organization to pool our resources together and endorse candidates who support our visions to the USFA Board of Directors. We also need an organization to collectively represent our common interests to communicate with USA Fencing. In cases where our members' legal rights are violated, FFO will on behalf of our members communicate with USFA, and if all such efforts fail, FFO will support members to take ultimate legal actions to hold those responsible and legally accountable.

When Students for Fair Admissions was established, few people could have imagined that two years later they would win against Harvard University, overturning affirmative action and reshape the college admission process. Similarly, Fair Fencing has the mission of seeking fair rights for every fencer and the entire fencing community as a whole. We will make fencing and USFA fairer, more transparent, more professional, and safer.

Now we invite everyone who agree with our beliefs to join us free on our website fairfencing.org. At this time, our membership registration is only open to existing USFA members. In the future, we will open membership registration to non-USFA members. All FFO member information is kept confidential at Fair Fencing and will not be shared with any other organizations or individuals. Any organization or individual who attempts to retaliate against Fair Fencing or its members is a serious violation of the SafeSport Code and U.S. federal and state laws, and will be met with our strongest legal response.

We also warmly welcome anyone who have the passion to serve the community join our operations team. If you have any questions about Fair Fencing Organization (FFO), please feel free to send an email to info@fairfencing.org. What we do today will build a fairer and better future for our current and upcoming generation of fencers for years to come.

Together we will make a difference!

Fair Fencing Organization Team

www.fairfencing.org