



April 27, 2011

Mr. Stan Williamson, Chair
Attn: Committee on Women's Athletics
The National Collegiate Athletic Association
700 W. Washington Street
P.O. Box 6222
Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-6222

Re: *STUNT's Petition for Emerging Sport Status*

Dear Mr. Williamson and Committee on Women's Athletics:

The American Association of University Women is aware of the efforts underway by USA Cheer to add STUNT as an NCAA emerging sport, and supports this endeavor. The initiative to place STUNT on the emerging sport list is important as it provides additional opportunities for women participate in athletics and derive the important educational benefits that come with participating in intercollegiate athletics.

Since its founding in 1881, AAUW has been breaking through barriers for women and girls. AAUW believes that expansion of athletic opportunities for girls and women must continue at both the high school and college levels, because it is important not only for the participants themselves but for the benefit of the greater community as well. AAUW's 2009-2011 Public Policy Program "...advocates vigorous enforcement of Title IX and all other civil rights laws pertaining to education."¹

Due to our work on behalf of girls and women in sports, AAUW believes that the expansion of sports participation opportunities for female student-athletes is needed to continue improve gender equity in the NCAA and to realize the promise of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX's impact on women's athletic participation is one of the country's greatest civil rights success stories, changing the playing field dramatically for girls and women in sports. In 1972, fewer than 32,000 women competed in intercollegiate athletics, they received only 2 percent of schools' athletic budgets, and athletic scholarships for women were nonexistent.² Between 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, the participation of female college athletes at NCAA institutions increased by 3,957 while men's participation increased by 5,040.³ According to NCAA reports, females comprise 54 percent of the college student population but receive only 45 percent of all college athletic participation opportunities. The addition of STUNT as an emerging sport in the NCAA program will help to close this gap.

Participating in sports brings lasting benefits to women and girls. Girls thrive when they participate in sports and are less likely to suffer from obesity or mental illness, have unprotected sex,⁴ get pregnant, drop out of school, do drugs, smoke, commit suicide or develop cancer, heart

or bone disease.⁵ Additionally, girls who participate in sports develop a more professional work ethic, improved cognitive skills, higher self-esteem, good school habits, and stronger college aspirations. College graduation rates are significantly higher for female athletes⁶ (72 percent) than for students in general (62 percent).⁷ Participation in sports also teaches women important professional lessons that have lifelong influence. For example, one study found that 80 percent of women identified as key leaders in Fortune 500 companies participated in sports while growing up.⁸ Furthermore, 82 percent of executive businesswomen played sports, with the majority saying lessons learned on the playing field contributed to their success.⁹

At the college level, currently women have few opportunities to participate in cheer, as the 800,000+ girls participating at the high school level are funneled into less than 40,000 opportunities to participate in traditional cheer. By offering STUNT teams, colleges and universities will open a whole new range of participation opportunities that were otherwise closed for young women and girls to continue participating in this sport at the collegiate level.

STUNT's classification as an NCAA emerging sport would provide colleges and universities with an effective way to expand female sports offerings and help improve compliance with Title IX. STUNT boasts a 30-person roster, 20-person competition team, at least 24 college scholarships, up to 16 competitions throughout the season, and robust regional and national post-season competitive schedules. This is comparable to other more-established male and female established sports. For example, almost all other sports have enough full grant-in-aids to support a full competitive team, plus between 20 percent to 15 percent additional athletes for substitutions, injuries, and practice players. A low scholarship allotment/ high roster count can prevent a college or university from being able to comply with its obligation to provide the total amount of scholarship funds available to men and women on a "substantially proportionate" basis.¹⁰ Additionally, a low competition requirement deprives athletes of their ability to improve and test their skills like other athletes, and makes it more likely that sideline cheerleaders will automatically fill the teams, without generating new opportunities for women. As such, STUNT could provide colleges and universities with an additional way to expand its female sports offerings and help improve compliance with Title IX. While it remains to be seen whether other OCR definitional requirements for a sport are being met until it is active on campuses, having the designated emerging sport status would advance the process.¹¹

Additionally, AAUW supports STUNT's classification as an emerging support because it requires far more rigor than traditional cheerleading activities. In traditional cheerleading, teams are primarily focused on crowd leadership at other sports' athletic contests and typically de-emphasize the athletic skills assessed in STUNT competitions. When traditional cheerleading teams do compete, teams are assessed under rules that can change from one competition to another and evaluate different factors. In contrast, in STUNT, the rules and scoring system are focused solely on performance evaluation and there are only two teams competing at a time. There is one set of rules and one scoring system that is followed at every game, which means the competition is much more objective and competitive. Judges are primarily in place to evaluate the execution of predetermined skills and the technique used by the team when performing their different elements.

Further, AAUW supports STUNT's classification as an emerging sport over other applicants, such as "acrobatics and tumbling." The structure of STUNT's competition is far more challenging for athletics, offering the opportunity to compete up 16 times per season, compared

to the 6-8 times per season offered by “acrobatics and tumbling.”¹² This increased opportunity for competition is a key reason for AAUW’s support of STUNT’s emerging sport classification.

We fully support the efforts of USA Cheer to secure NCAA emerging sport status for STUNT and urge the Committee on Women’s Athletics to approve their proposal for formal designation. If you have any questions or need additional information, feel free to contact me at 202/785-7720, or Beth Scott, regulatory affairs manager, at 202/728-7617.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Maatz
Director, Public Policy and Government Relations

¹ AAUW. (June 2009). *2009-11 AAUW Public Policy Program*. Retrieved April 21, 2011, from www.aauw.org/act/issue_advocacy/principles_priorities.cfm.

² National Women’s Law Center. (2002). *Equal Opportunity for Women in Athletics: A Promise Yet to be Fulfilled, A Report to the Commission on Opportunity in Athletics*. Retrieved August 11, 2009, from http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/EOforWomeninAthletics_APromiseYettobeFulfilled.pdf.

³ National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2010). *1982-81—2009-10 NCAA Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report*. Retrieved March 1, 2011, from www.ncaapublications.com/productdownloads/PR2011.pdf.

⁴ Women’s Sports Foundation. (December 2009). *Her Life Depends On It II*. Retrieved March 1, 2011, from www.womenssportsfoundation.org/~media/Files/Research%20Reports/Her%20Life%20Depends%20On%20It%20II%20%20Covers%20and%20Inside%20with%20December.pdf.

⁵ Women’s Sports Foundation. (December 12, 2007). *Women’s Sports & Physical Activity Facts & Statistics*. Retrieved March 1, 2011, from www.womenssportsfoundation.org/binary-data/WSF_ARTICLE/pdf_file/191.pdf.

⁶ *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. (November 17, 2006). *Graduation Rates for College Athletes Reach Historic Highs*. Retrieved April 19, 2011, from <https://chronicle.com/article/Graduation-Rates-for-College/3063/>.

⁷ Women’s Sports Foundation. (December 2009). *Her Life Depends On It II*. Retrieved March 1, 2011, from www.womenssportsfoundation.org/~media/Files/Research%20Reports/Her%20Life%20Depends%20On%20It%20II%20%20Covers%20and%20Inside%20with%20December.pdf.

⁸ Women’s Sports Foundation. (2007). *Learn About the Women’s Sports Foundation*. Retrieved March 1, 2011, from www.womenssportsfoundation.org/cgi-bin/iowa/events/article.html?record=227.

⁹ Mass Mutual Financial Group. (2002). *From the Locker Room to the Boardroom: A Survey on Sports in the Lives of Women Business Executives*.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education. (December 11, 1979). *Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; A Policy Interpretation; Title IX and Intercollegiate Athletics*, 44 Fed. Reg. 71,413, 71,418. Retrieved April 26, 2011, from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/t9interp.html>.

¹¹ AAUW is not in favor of changing the definition of a sport for Title IX purposes, as detailed in OCR’s “Dear Colleague” Letter from Stephanie Monroe, Assistant Secretary of Education for Civil Rights (September 17, 2008) available at: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-20080917.html>.

¹² National Collegiate Acrobatics and Tumbling Association. (2010). *FAQ*. Retrieved April 27, 2011, from <http://www.thencata.org/faq.html>.