

Dear Members of the Youth Climbing Task Force; Ms. Felson Di Pietro, President, USA Climbing; and Mr. Norman, CEO, USA Climbing:

We are privileged to be part of the youth climbing movement at a time of unparalleled excitement and interest in competitive climbing. In the US, there is unprecedented growth in youth climbing, with the number of youth competitors nearly tripling from 2021 to 2024, expanding the pipeline for future elite athletes and building a love for the sport in a new generation. This summer, the world witnessed three current youth-aged climbers ascend the Olympic podium and learned about the pivotal role youth climbing played in the launching the careers of many other Olympians.

USA Climbing's changes to the Youth Series and advocacy within IFSC to limit youth athletes' access to the global climbing community **make the successes seen in Paris impossible for today's youth competitors**, they discourage new young athletes from finding their passion in competitive climbing, and they diminish the pipeline for future Team USA elite athletes.

National Federations around the world have had to align to IFSC's updated youth age categories for U17, U19, and U21. The USA Climbing Youth Task Force **went beyond IFSC's requirements and rubber-stamped a reshaped Youth Series**. The Task Force has

- Denied scores of athletes the opportunity to compete in divisional and national events,
- Restricted >500 competitors from competing in lead, and
- Discouraged younger climbers from getting involved in competitive climbing by adding older athletes to the youngest age group

Youth athletes have fewer developmental and competitive opportunities because of these changes, jeopardizing our pipeline of climbers. USA Climbing has implemented and expanded on IFSC's age group changes without meaningful input from USA-based youth climbers and their families.

Limitless Engagement for Athlete Development in Climbing (LEAD Climbing) is a diverse group of youth climbing parents, guardians, supporters, and allies **advocating to expand developmental and competitive opportunities for young climbers** while growing the sport.

We are concerned that the voice advocating for the development needs of youth climbers is getting lost across USA Climbing's broad constituency. LEAD Climbing is that voice. **We call on USA Climbing to**

- **Immediately expand the Youth Task Force** to include more parents/guardians of active youth climbers, particularly those with climbers under 15 who are most effected by the recent changes
- **Develop a mechanism to engage the signatories of this letter** in shaping the Youth Series and related programming as required by the Youth Task Force Charter
- **Create a plan for multiple competitive tracks** aligned with the American Development Model, similar to Olympic development programs in more established sports
- **Stay true to the "U" designation**--devise a safe approach to allow athletes to compete in older age groups if they are able
- **Establish a U11 age group** to ensure early climbers are engaged and developed appropriately
- **Begin lead climbing in U15** instead of in U17 to improve skill development
- **Allow U17 competitors to compete in NACS** and allow athletes to “excel for high performance” in line with the American Development Model
- **Add back Divisionals and Nationals for U13** for the 2024/2025 season and beyond

We are excited to shape the future of the Youth Series together and build the pipeline of future elite athletes by partnering with USA Climbing to provide limitless opportunities for our youth athletes to discover, develop, compete, and excel in climbing.

Respectfully,
LEAD Climbing