

My name is Tina Maharath and I am a community leader in Central Ohio representing the Asian American community. I grew up in Whitehall, Ohio which is a suburb right outside of Columbus. I was the child of refugee parents who came here in Laos during the Vietnam War Era. Due to language and socio-economic barriers, my parents didn't have the best employment opportunities. I was often placed in after-school programs and sports to have a place to go and stay off the streets since I excelled in school.

In the 6th grade I accidentally became an advocate for equal rights. There weren't many options for sports and there weren't any after school programs available in the 6th grade for me. It was either dance team in the fall or wrestling in the winter. There were 2 males who tried out for the dance team and got places in the fall and I got a place for the wrestling team in the winter. People identified the males as gay men for wanting to join a "girl" sport and I was deemed a tom boy for wanting to join a "boy". This frustrated us because we were just kids wanting to stay athletic until it was time for 7th grade and would be eligible for other sports. We decided to stand up and speak up for these sports to deem that it shouldn't have a gender identity to them. We all have to try out and get a place on the team just like everyone else. A job that a male can do, a female can do and vice versa. Ever since then the school stopped publishing the sports as the "Girls" dance team or the "Boys" Wrestling team.

I am standing in the front of the committee today to ask that we provide the constituents of Ohio fairness and equality for all of Ohio. As public servants, it is our duty to be the spoken voice for the unspoken. How can we properly serve all of the constituents of Ohio equally if we are discriminating against sexual orientation and gender identity?