

Good afternoon, Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 442.

My name is Xu Jia or you can call me Valentina. I am an international student from China, and this is my fourth year attending high school at Maumee Valley Country Day School, located in Toledo, Ohio.

Time flies by, while I can still remember the 14-year-old me waving at my family at the Hong Kong airport, I realize that I am now a high school senior who will soon fly back with a high school diploma and an offer to Cornell University.

Four years ago, before coming to the United States, I was excited because I have heard about a lot of great things about America. People say this is the “land of opportunity,” where if I work hard enough, I can succeed. Or they tell me I am going to a country where freedom is within the air. I was excited about experiencing a totally different education system from that of China, making new friends, and exploring the culture.

After school, seeing a lot of my classmates are on the field running and laughing, I thought it would be a good idea to join them and get some exercise every day. Without any knowledge about what field hockey is and how it is played, I was generously accepted to the JV team and began learning from the beginning. Though the practices were hard, I saw my skills improving and made a lot of friends with my teammates. I loved playing field hockey and couldn't wait for my first field hockey game.

Two days before the game, when the coach read off the players' position, my name was not on the roster. After practice, the bad news came: according to the Ohio High School Athletics Association's bylaws, international students were banned from playing sports games. Out of frustration and anger, I broke down into tears. But I chose to stay on the team and cheer for my teammates even though I was only able to practice and could not play in games.

In the regional semi-final, one teammate accidentally fell in the rain and sustained a serious leg injury. Mud enveloped her white uniform. But there was no substitute. I asked my coach to put me in. She shrugged. “The rule.” In the rain, I couldn't tell if I cried again.

Some of my international friends felt sorry for me and asked if now I have understood why I was the only international student on the team. Then, I saw more and more international students who couldn't play soccer or basketball in games quitting practicing. My friends in other states told me to transfer, and I would be able to compete.

Maybe I was stubborn, but I didn't transfer because I liked the school. For three years, I chose to take the "practice only" option and watched all field hockey games on the bench. But this stubbornness brought me luck. While I was prepared to practice field hockey for my senior year again, I got an email from my headmaster and coach. They told me I would be able to play this year. When I got the email, it was like getting my dream college acceptance and I couldn't stop smiling. I was so happy. But then, strangely, while all international students at my school cheered for the news, other international students in the area didn't get any notification saying that they can play. Then, I realized what I got wasn't equality; it was a privilege.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'd be happy to answer any questions that you may have.