



603 E. Town St.
Columbus, OH 43215

info@kycohio.org
614-294-5437

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Ohio Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee
1 Capitol Square Columbus, OH 43215

Chairman Brenner, Vice-Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Ohio Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to the portion of House Bill 151 regarding transgender athletes. My name is Mallory Golski, and I use she/her pronouns. During the day, I'm the civic engagement and advocacy manager for Kaleidoscope Youth Center, Ohio's largest and longest standing organization serving and supporting LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults, ages 12-24.

But, during the evenings – and most weekends – I'm a swim coach for a swim team here in Columbus. This isn't my first coaching gig: I started coaching about ten years ago. I've coached swimmers from preschool to high school and I've taught swim lessons to people ranging in age from 2 to 62. I swam competitively for nearly a decade, and I currently swim on two Masters teams here in Columbus.

In short, I'm no stranger to the pool.

For nearly a year and a half, I've gotten to coach one swimmer, whom I'd like to tell you about today. For her safety and privacy, I won't share her name. It's one I've only learned recently myself, as she's transgender and was using her given name when we first met.

I'll never forget the day I first saw this swimmer show up to practice wearing a girl's practice suit instead of a boy's suit. Before any other practice, this swimmer would sit on the bleachers, leaving her sweats on until the last second before she got into the pool. When she was out of the water, it was straight to the towel – then to the clothes, which went right back on. It also wasn't unusual to see her slouching, with her arms crossed over her chest.

But on this day, this swimmer was already dressed for practice when I arrived. She struck a pose, beaming as she showed off her blue suit with a colorful floral print that matched her light

pink manicure and hot pink swim cap. It was clear that she was feeling at home in her body and more like herself than she had ever felt around the pool.

It's hard for any young athlete (especially swimmers, who aren't wearing much!) to not constantly think about bodies, play the comparison game, and worry that being shorter or heavier than others might make you slower – let alone someone who's transgender, who worries that their body makes them not fit in at *all*. There's some legitimacy to the body worry: Having a particular body type, or size, or amount of muscle *could* lead to some competitive advantages – look at Michael Phelps, whose 6'4" stature, 6'7" wingspan, unusually flexible ankles and body that produces less lactic acid than others' *does* help him to be a better swimmer. But most young athletes – even those in high school, and even those who are transgender but aren't on hormones – aren't at a point where physiological differences make a big difference in their performance, if any at all. I see this all the time: In swimming, unlike most other sports, athletes of all ages, genders and ability levels are all in the pool at the same time. I can name many instances when I've coached cisgender female athletes who are faster than their cisgender male peers of the same age.

The swimmer I've described is talented, and her times are comparable – if not a little slower – than the other girls in her age group. For instance, the cisgender girl who's generally our fastest female swimmer swims the 50 free in 30.09, while this transgender girl's best time is 33.72. Do I think the trans swimmer has the potential to give other female athletes on our team a run – err, a swim – for their money? If she pushes herself, absolutely. I'll be thrilled if that happens, because having that competition will push the other girls on the team to swim their fastest, too.

Now, do I think this swimmer might give our team an advantage? Also yes.

This swimmer is the first to raise her hand when I ask for a volunteer, and at swim meets, she's always at the end of the lane cheering on her teammates. In fact, swim meets are often structured so that older kids swim during one session, while younger kids swim during a different session. This swimmer routinely offers to stay for the *entire* day so she can lend a hand, helping her younger teammates get to the blocks before their races, and giving them pointers before they swim. It's clear that the younger swimmers look up to her, and for good reason: She is the definition of a brave leader, an authentic role model, and a genuine friend. Every team benefits from diversity, and any team would be incredibly lucky to have a swimmer like her as part of the group.

Unfortunately, there's a high school team in Central Ohio that's missing out.



At 14 years old, this swimmer should be experiencing her first high school swim season. But, for a variety of reasons – including a fear of not being accepted, the fact that she’d still be ineligible to compete as a girl, and impending worries about legislation like this passing – this swimmer is continuing to swim on our league, which has less restrictive guidelines for allowing transgender athletes to compete. While I wouldn’t foresee a State cut in her future, even if she was competing for her high school, she still deserves the chance to represent her school – and so do all other transgender athletes.

There’s already a thorough (if not *overly* thorough) OHSAA policy in place, and transgender girls are not taking away opportunities from cisgender athletes. Please don’t take away opportunities away from them: vote no on this legislation and any other legislation that would discriminate against transgender Ohioans.

