

Chairperson Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Rene Hick, my pronouns are she/her/hers and I strongly oppose SB 132/HB151.

As the parent of a transgender male athlete who was approved by the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) to participate according to their Transgender Student Policy in 2019 and in 2020, I would specifically like to address the amendment that includes the provisions of HB 61 banning transgender athletes from participating in sports.

My husband and I are both former high school varsity athletes who value the physical health, mental well being, leadership opportunities, teamwork and time management skills that we gained through our participation in team sports. So when we became parents, we encouraged both of our children to participate in different sports from a very young age. Countless hours were spent at soccer and baseball fields, basketball courts and the sidelines of cross country courses but swimming pools were where we logged the most hours supporting them in their athletic endeavors.

When our son came out to us at the age of sixteen, he had already been swimming competitively for over seven years, including two years on the girl's high school swim team. Being in the water was always therapeutic for him, from his first bath to lane swimming, but as his sophomore swim season came to a close, we could see him slowly disengaging from the sport he had always loved. What we didn't understand at the time was that the impact of the dysphoria he was experiencing while swimming on the girl's swim team was greatly outweighing the benefits of participating in a team sport.

Because of the discrimination, harassment, bullying, and social rejection that transgender youth face I vividly remember the stress and fear involved with each potential obstacle he faced as he began his transition. But overall we were very fortunate that the support he received from his friends, family and school community was affirming.

Specific to this bill, when we met with his high school principal it was not a question of "if" he would be supported in his social transition at school, but "how" the school could best support him. This is when we were contacted by the Athletic Director about the OHSAA Transgender Student athlete policy. We were told by the swim coach that our son was a valued member of the team and would be welcomed and encouraged to swim on the team consistent with his gender identity.

We submitted all of the necessary paperwork according to OHSSA policy and he was granted approval to compete on the boys swim team his junior and again his senior swim seasons. We saw his confidence return and his mental health improve dramatically as he was able to participate in competitive swimming without having to choose between his gender identity and his sport. He went on to earn his varsity letter and graduated as a scholar athlete.

This discriminatory bill is a solution to a controversy that doesn't exist here in Ohio and instead denies an already vulnerable population of students the physiological, emotional and social benefits of participating in sports. OHSAA already has a clear policy in place that seeks to be fair to all athletes, protects the integrity of women's sports AND provides participation opportunities for transgender athletes.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill that only serves to legitimize the message that our transgender youth are not welcome to participate fully in spaces that are otherwise open to everyone else. No student should have to choose between their gender identity and participating in high school sports.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today. I will now take any questions you may have.