



**Maria Bruno, Public Policy Director**  
**HB 151, Testimony in Opposition December 13th, 3pm**  
**Senate Education Committee**

To Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, my name is Maria Bruno and I am the Public Policy Director of Equality Ohio, a nonpartisan statewide LGBTQ+ education and advocacy organization.

As an organization that values inclusion for all kids no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation, Equality Ohio asks you to vote NO on **House Bill 151**. To be clear, the amendment that was adopted in the last Committee hearing does NOT change the fact that the bill would still completely ban transgender girls from participating in school sports at the k-12 level.

We recognize that the headline grabber for the last iteration of this bill was the horrifying genital-inspection language, which your newest draft removes. And while the newest language may not provoke such a visceral reaction, I assure you, it's still brutal. The newest amendment language would require an athlete to show an original birth certificate that indicates Female. **In other words: transgender girls would never be allowed to participate in school athletics under this language, full stop.**

The Chair of this Committee indicated to the press that this iteration of the bill would “not ban trans girls, only boys.” This assertion is false; the only way one could possibly reach this conclusion is if one does not believe that transgender girls exist. **Transgender girls DO exist—and you will hear the amazing stories of many of them today in this hearing. And they deserve to play school sports, just as they have been able to for the past near decade without issue. LGBTQ+ youth, including transgender girls and women, are indeed federally protected under title IX,<sup>1</sup> something this bill directly contradicts.**

Let's remember what Title IX is about—making sure that all girls, including girls who are transgender, have the opportunity to participate in sports. We can celebrate girls' sports and protect transgender youth from discrimination, making sure that all young people can access the lessons and opportunities that sports afford.

Trans kids just want the opportunity to participate like everyone else. Sports teach important skills like teamwork, healthy competition, socialization, and leadership. Being a part of a team, for a group that is so marginalized, can be invaluable to helping children establish relationships and feel a sense of belonging. We know that youth sports often play a significant role in children's lives and development.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 7 in 10 (69.1%) young people between the ages of

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Spivack, Esq. [Transgender Student Rights in Schools](#). Equality Ohio (2021) Web.

<sup>2</sup> Holt, N. L. (Ed.). (2016). *Positive youth development through sport*. Chicago, IL: Routledge.



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6-12 participate in some form of sport.<sup>3</sup> Sport spaces help children develop critical life skills like communication, teamwork, and leadership—and give them a community of peers with whom they can connect and can develop life-long friendships.<sup>4</sup>

These important life skills and connections are even more important for marginalized communities like ours. In 2021, 42% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth. But transgender and nonbinary youth who reported having pronouns respected by all of the people they lived with attempted suicide at half the rate of those who did not have their pronouns respected by anyone with whom they lived.<sup>5</sup> For many youth, sports are an opportunity to grow, to find friends, and to be themselves. This legislation takes that supportive environment away from kids who need it.

**And for what? The Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) has a policy that works, and has worked since 2013.** In the state of Ohio, transgender girls can play on a girls team if they show they have completed at least one year of hormone replacement therapy.<sup>6</sup> Hormone therapy is always a medical decision directed by a specialized doctor, and the decision of whether to utilize hormone therapy should not prevent youth from playing sports.

**Around 400,000 total students in grades 7-12 participate in OHSAA sports.** The number of students who have requested to play under the transgender policy is small since the organization began keeping track in 2015-2016 school year. According to the interested party testimony submitted on December 6th to this committee by OHSAA, since the 2015-16 school year, **there have been seven transgender girls who have participated in high school sports in all of Ohio.** There have been eight transgender girls who have participated at the 7/8 grade level, for a total of fifteen children in eight years. There are no current lawsuits or alleged issues in Ohio, even specifically amongst transgender girls.<sup>7</sup>

This legislation is a solution in search of a problem. Overruling a thoughtful, functional policy by a private regulatory body and replacing it with a total ban is an extreme government overreach. The associations that regulate sports can be trusted to update and regulate sports without government intervention. The state legislature is not best suited to be deciding on youth sports regulations.

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<sup>3</sup> The Aspen Institute: Project Play. (2018). State of play 2018: Trends and developments. Retrieved from [https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2018/10/StateofPlay2018\\_v4WEB\\_2-FINAL.pdf](https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2018/10/StateofPlay2018_v4WEB_2-FINAL.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Turnnidge, J., Côté, J., & Hancock, D. J. (2014). Positive youth development from sport to life: Explicit or implicit transfer?. *Quest*, 66(2), 203-217.

<sup>5</sup> The [Trevor Project National Mental Health Survey](#) (2021). Introduction.

<sup>6</sup> The Ohio High School Athletic Association [Transgender Policy](#). Pg. 3. Doug Ute, Executive Director.

<sup>7</sup> OHSAA Interested Party Testimony on HB 151, Doug Ute December 6th, 2022.



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Conservatives in a number of states, including the conservative governors of Utah and Indiana, have said no to legislation regulating transgender kids in athletics. Governor Cox of Utah said it best, so today I will leave you with his words, **“Rarely has so much fear and anger been directed at so few. I don’t understand what they are going through or why they feel the way they do. But I want them to live.”**<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [Utah Gov. Cox Vetoes Transgender Athlete Bill](#), Washington Post (2022)