

Madison Smith

Thank you for considering my concerns raised in opposition to House Bill 151 and Senate Bill 132, the Save Women's Sports Act. This dangerous legislation targets an already vulnerable group of Ohio youth and denies them the often life saving opportunity to participate in sports.

I just played my last collegiate soccer game this weekend. I have been an athlete for the past 16 years of my life, captaining my university's varsity team this spring season, and can honestly say that sports have helped me grow into the person I am today. The lessons I have learned about teamwork, hard work, overcoming adversity, confidence, leadership, and being part of something bigger than yourself, are lessons I will carry with me for the rest of my life. The relationships I have formed with my teammates and coaches have provided me with so much support, love, and joy, and have shaped me into the person I am today.

Every child deserves the opportunity to have this same experience. I am privileged enough that my right to play the sport I love was never contested, simply because I identify as a cis-woman. Sports are a uniquely powerful platform for inclusion and acceptance, and for getting to know people on a deeper level. I have experienced this power of sports countless times throughout my soccer career, through my own teams, as well as through work with disabled athletes through the Special Olympics. The fact of the matter is that every child deserves to be included, supported, and loved. Identity should never be a barrier to experiencing this form of inclusion; in fact, transgender youth are often individuals who most need support and inclusion.

The argument that there will be unfair advantages in sports does not hold a lot of weight for me personally, especially as I consider all of the other barriers and stressors that transgender youth face in their everyday lives. In contrast, these kids are at a disadvantage as a result of all the outside factors. Moreover, the main goal of youth sports should never really be solely about winning a competition. As I mentioned, all of my main takeaways from playing soccer for almost my entire life have to do with the lessons I learned and the relationships I formed. Most of my fellow athletes would say the same. If these are the goals of youth sports, there should be no concern about including trans athletes.

To deny trans youth the opportunity to participate in sports is to deny children opportunities for belonging, growth, authentic relationships, and so many life lessons. We cannot promote the power of sports to foster belonging, confidence, and inclusion, if certain individuals are excluded from participation as a result of the identities they possess.

I urge you to oppose HB151 and SB132 and protect our state's athletes.