

Ohio Chapter

INCORPORATED IN OHIO

American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

December 13th, 2022

The Honorable Andy Brenner
Chairman, Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Ohio Senate
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Chairman Brenner and Members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee—

On behalf of the nearly 3,000 members of the Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, I am writing today to express our opposition to House Bill 151, specifically to provisions that could harm transgender youth in Ohio. It is my hope that this language can either be removed or amended prior to reporting the measure out this week.

For organizations who are concerned about this language, this committee hearing represents the first time we've been able to offer testimony on the subject. House Bill 151 originally dealt with teacher mentoring and passed the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee unanimously. On the House floor, an amendment was offered to incorporate the text of House Bill 61, the so-called *Save Women's Sports Act*. HB 61 has only had two hearings in House Committee, both coming more than a year ago. Further, this committee has already had to amend HB 151 to address problematic language around genital inspections. Clearly this issue merits more time and attention than it is being afforded.

Participation in athletic competition is beneficial for all students and we should want our education system to be as inclusive as possible. For transgender youth, being able to participate in sports and activities with your preferred gender group is essential; this population already has an exceptionally high suicide rate, and sports offer a way for these students to feel accepted. Further, the *Save Women's Sports Act* is built upon a faulty premise that transgender females are dominating athletic competition, winning medals, setting records, and being given scholarships. This simply is not the case in Ohio. Over the past decade, the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) has granted approval to 15 transgender girls to participate in women's sports; these individuals have not harmed athletic competition and have been welcomed by their teammates and competitors. Our children are setting the example for how we should all conduct ourselves and respect others.

While the language around genital inspections was removed, our organization remains concerned over provisions in the bill allowing parents, athletes, and coaches to openly challenge the sex of youth athletes. This process is not spelled out and could lead to individuals making allegations publicly about the gender of athletes. It is deeply concerning to think that a student athlete's gender could be questioned while she stands on a podium on front of her peers. No child should have to endure this.

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We are also confused as to why this bill only targets schools that are part of OHSAA. If this policy is indeed needed to protect the integrity of women's sports, and proponents suggest, then shouldn't it apply to all competition in Ohio? Why are NCAA sports, private schools, and youth athletic leagues exempt? This is especially confounding when you consider OHSAA has strong protocols in place that govern transgender competition and protect women's sports. Sports leagues have already worked to address this issue and should not have their hard work undone by passage of HB151. In fact, I would argue that adopting OHSAA guidelines would be an excellent alternative since they have been shown to create a pathway for participation by transgender athletes while protecting the integrity of athletic competition in Ohio.

In closing, I simply want to stress that this bill is part of a broader movement targeting transgender youth that is deeply alarming to our members. Ohio's pediatricians are committed to the health and wellness of our children. Please help us in this effort by rejecting the harmful portions of HB 151. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melissa Wervey Arnold".

Melissa Wervey Arnold
Chief Executive Officer
Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

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