

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for reading my testimony in opposition to House Bill 151.

My step-daughter is in 8th grade. Like other 14-year-olds, she is figuring out who she is, what she is passionate about, how she wants to express herself and spend her time. We are figuring out what high school she will attend and what extracurricular activities she will participate in when she attends. Among others, she wants to play sports, most likely (at the moment) volleyball.

Playing team sports as a kid gave me the opportunity to build community, confidence, and teamwork skills. Like most student athletes, I did not break any records or go to the Olympics, but the experience was immensely valuable for me. My step-daughter probably will not break any records or go to the Olympics, either, and I want her to have the same opportunity I did without fear of bullying or an invasion of her privacy because of who she is. I believe that all kids deserve that opportunity, whether they are cisgender like me or transgender like my step-daughter.

House Bill 151 is legislation in search of a problem that does not exist and represents state-sanctioned bullying against an already marginalized population. Participation in team sports is a common way for children and young adults to build community, and LGBTQ Ohioans have every right to join in these activities. In the Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, nearly 1 in 5 transgender and nonbinary youth attempted suicide. Their report also shows that LGBTQ kids who live in an accepting community report significantly lower rates of attempting suicide compared with those who do not. LGBTQ youth deserve to feel safe and supported by their communities.

In addition to the emotional harm, this bill threatens to invade the privacy of all Ohioans who participate in sports. Under HB 151, anyone, for any reason, can dispute a player's sex, forcing the player to provide their original birth certificate to establish their sex.

Please focus on supporting transgender Ohioans like my step-daughter, not isolating them further with harmful legislation. I urge you to reject HB 151.

Brendan Kelley  
Columbus