

Testimony of Alex Wolf-Root, PhD
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Representative Tom Young, Chair
April 19th, 2023

Chair Young, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Alex Wolf-Root, and I am a Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy at The Ohio State University who specializes in the philosophy of sport. I do not represent The Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to House Bill 6.

Others have surely explained why this big government interference in personal expression is problematic – it harms already marginalized members of our community while doing nothing to meaningfully promote sport for women and girls – so I want to take the time to explain why this is problematic from the point of view of sport.

Sport isn't simply about competition, though it certainly involves it. Sport is a thing we made up, and is done with varying purposes in various social institutions. When it comes to scholastic sport, while competition matters – and I say this as a former high school track champion and NCAA also-ran – competition simply isn't the primary value. While competitive virtues do matter, what matters most are other more social values such as good sportspersonship, learning to work with others, creating opportunities to be healthy, and challenging ourselves on and off the field. We can learn and develop such values from competing in sport, certainly, but we also know that competitive success in scholastic sport at the expense of all other values is bad.

You should re-read what the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA), as well as the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), takes to be major focuses of scholastic sport. Two of the OHSAA's major bullet points deserve your focus here:

- Participation in interscholastic athletics programs complements a student's school experience and teaches lifelong lessons of hard work, teamwork and self-discipline.
- Participation in interscholastic athletics programs promotes citizenship and sporting behavior, instills a sense of community and promotes a lifetime appreciation for sports and healthy lifestyles.

To better achieve the widespread goals of scholastic sport, scholastic sport must be inclusive for all, very much including transgender athletes.

Even if you're convinced that competitive advantage is the one major focus of scholastic sport (though it is not), we already allow a wide range of advantages in sport. Some schools are better funded than others. Some students don't have to work after school and so can focus on their sport. Some individuals are taller, have stronger hearts, are better ability to

flush lactate, and have many other biological characteristics that can act as relative advantages in sport.

More strongly, we don't simply allow a wide range of advantages in sport, we celebrate them.

When we celebrate elite athletes we often celebrate those with outlier characteristics. Michael Phelps and Usain Bolt are two prime examples. Though there is an important difference we shouldn't overlook: there are no transgender athletes who have made anywhere close to the impact of a Phelps or a Bolt in their sport. Most transgender athletes, like most athletes, lose far more often than they win. The few high profile successful transgender athletes are outliers, and even then they aren't doing to their sports what Phelps or Bolt have done. As she's been a major face of this, we must recall that Lia Thomas lost as well as won in the women's division during her prime, and has already begun having her records broken by other women. Lest we forget, she was very good in the men's division two years prior to competing in the women's division, as that was before she started medicating herself for her transition. The NCAA already has policies in place about transgender athletes competing, and, while there might be some problems with those policies, it would be the height of hubris to think that partisan politicians would understand the competitive aspects of intercollegiate sport better than the NCAA and the relevant sport governing bodies.

If your goal from this bill is to undermine sport and cause more harm to our transgender neighbors, then HB 6 is for you. If you care about your community and you care about sport, you will oppose HB 6.

I urge you to oppose House Bill 6. Thank you for your time.