

Chairman Young, Ranking member Miller, and members of the House Higher Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 6.

My name is Minna Zelch and I use she/her pronouns. I'm the proud parent of two Ohio public school students, one of whom happens to be transgender and an athlete.

My daughter is a senior in high school and is the middle of her third season of softball. This sport has been a literal lifeline for her. It has given her a sense of belonging in an environment where she previously felt ostracized. She wanted to play in middle school but had to wait three years before she could be approved by the OHSAA. I can tell you from experience that the approval process is extensive. Students must apply every year for every sport they want to play. For the past three years, my daughter has spent January and February practicing with her team, knowing full well she might never play a game. We turn over blood tests showing her estrogen and testosterone levels, a list of all the medications she takes along with how long she has been taking them, and her height and weight growth charts. The process is embarrassing, anxiety inducing, and exhausting, but worth it if it means my kid will get to play a sport she loves.

According to the OHSAA, 17 transgender girls have been approved to play girls' sports in grades 7-12 since 2015. That's 17 girls in 8 years. So far this year, 7 trans girls have been approved to play. The OHSAA governs about 350,000 athletes every year, half of whom are girls. This means that so far this year, only .00004% of female athletes in Ohio are transgender. Supporters of this bill like to say that trans girls are taking over female sports. If that is the goal of trans athletes they clearly aren't doing a very good job.

The NCAA also has an extensive approval process for transgender athletes. They do not publish their numbers because they are so extremely low it could risk the privacy and safety of their athletes. My daughter would like to play softball at the Division 3 or club level in college, something this legislation would prevent.

Therefore, my daughter will contribute to Ohio's brain drain and go to another state for college. She even won a vax-2-school scholarship that she is having to leave on the table because Ohio is no longer a safe place for her. Thanks to all the anti-LGBTQ legislation introduced here she never wants to come back to Ohio after she graduates. She feels like she must escape to a more welcoming state just so she can breathe. Like so many others, she had become one of many casualties in your culture war. How many more young people and families are you willing to sacrifice to score a few political points?

We are often asked why our daughter doesn't just play on the boys' baseball team. In her testimony she told you why playing on the boys' team is not an option for her. But she left out a critical detail that her father and I have to consider as her parents, the fact that this simply would not be safe for her. When she took PE her freshman year, a group of boys in the class targeted her for harassment. They called her words I will not repeat, tried to trip her, and kicked and threw balls at her head. She broke her ankle in that class. Two weeks later, a ball was kicked at her face and she broke her finger. Both injuries eventually required major surgeries and 18 months of recovery. As Ember's parents, we could not risk her physical safety by letting her play a sport in such a toxic environment.

As a woman, and former athlete, the most disturbing aspect of this law is that it is an attack on all girls. This legislation subjects female bodies to judgement. It forces girls to prove their gender and an accusation alone means that something about that girl made someone think they aren't female enough. Think of the message this sends to young girls. No real girl can run that fast or hit that hard so you must be a boy. You're really big. You look like a boy. You aren't very pretty. I think you're really a boy.

While such situations may sound far-fetched, this is precisely what is happening in states that have already passed bans. Athletes are being investigated because they don't "look feminine enough."<sup>1</sup> This is what we have to look forward to in Ohio; witch hunts where no girl is safe and girls who are big for their age, or are

especially good at their sport are most at risk. Are you really okay with dehumanizing trans girls, who are already some of the most vulnerable members of our society, and subjecting all girls to body shaming and potential cruel accusations in an attempt to solve a problem that has never existed in Ohio?

The fact is this is not, and never has been, about protecting girls. When was the last time any of you attended a girls' sporting event where your own daughter, granddaughter, or someone else you knew wasn't a participant? If you are like most Americans, it has probably been awhile or never at all. And yet, I'd be willing to bet each of you has been to at least one Browns, Bengals, Guardians, Reds, Cavs, or local Friday night football game. Can you even name more than one or two famous female athletes? Female teams in this state still have woefully inadequate equipment and facilities compared to their male counterparts. I see it at our own school and many of the schools where our team plays. If you truly wanted to help girls you would do something that might actually make their lives better. Require equity in athletic equipment, facilities, and salaries. Lift them up by giving them the same attention consistently shown to their brothers instead of tearing them down by telling them they aren't good enough to compete against their trans sisters.

My daughter is a girl. She knows she is a girl the same way my son knows he is left-handed. No one told them they were this way. No one encouraged them. This is just how they were born and I couldn't change them if I tried.

Transgender girls are girls. They deserve the same basic rights that are given to every other student. They want the opportunity to make friends, work hard, and support their peers. They want the camaraderie of being part of a team. They just want to play.

Trans kids are just kids, trying to find their way in a world that tears them down every single day. Please don't be another one of their bullies. Let the current policies stand. They are based on science and research and are clearly doing their job.

I ask you to please consider my testimony and vote no on this unnecessary and harmful bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'm happy to answer any questions.

Sources:

<sup>1</sup><https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2022-08-18/utah-officials-secretly-looked-into-female-athletes-gender>