



The Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and
Gender Expansive Identities of Ohio

Chairman Young, Ranking Member Miller, and all members of the House Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 6. My name is Mariah Payne, and I am here on behalf of the Ohio Counseling Association (OCA). In the OCA, I act as the Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities of Ohio (SAIGEO) Northeast Representative. I am a licensed professional counselor in North Ridgeville Ohio and am incredibly active in my community. My clinical work focuses on LGBTQ mental health, making me well-qualified to speak on this topic today.

The OCA and SAIGEO oppose House Bill 6 because it will adversely impact trans, gender expansive, and intersex youth and young adults across the state. This bill is discriminatory and unnecessary. Trans girls have played sports in Ohio for decades, a handful currently play (OHSAA, 2022), in fact several of the current players are here testifying today. They have not dominated any sport and there have been no issues in Ohio until this bill in its various iterations was proposed. Because there is only evidence of concerns and not a problem, this bill cannot be about fairness in women's and girls' sports. Instead, it becomes a bill that forces trans and gender expansive people out of public spaces. It punishes them for their authenticity and takes from them the ability to participate in society.

Many proponents of this bill noted research that says that trans women have an advantage in sports. They cited studies with significant methodological flaws that have been soundly criticized by professionals (Avery, 2021; Factora, 2022). There is a much larger body of peer-reviewed research that demonstrates that trans women do not have an advantage in sports (Harper, 2016; Handelsman et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2017; Karkazis, 2019; Kornei, 2018).

This bill and ones like it do not protect women, they harm them. Excluding trans women invites gender policing that subjects women and girls to invasive tests and accusations of cheating (ACLU, 2020). This has already been used to ban cisgender women from sports (Clifton, 2021). This bill also reinforces problematic gender stereotypes (Medley & Sherwin, 2019). Furthermore, it undermines team unity and encourages divisiveness (Carroll, 2020), the very opposite of what we hope our children will learn from team sports.

Some proponents of this bill cited Title IX as a reason to exclude trans athletes. This demonstrates that they fundamentally misunderstand trans people and their identities. Trans women are women and trans girls are girls. They belong in sports and Title IX should protect them too.

One proponent focused his testimony on his idea of the mental challenges young women face by including trans women in sports. We understand his concerns and as mental health professionals we can say that there is no evidence of this as an emerging trend. However, there is significant

evidence of the negative impact that social exclusion and hostile school policies have on trans and gender expansive youth (Abreu, 2020; Craig et al., 2018; Mason et al., 2017; Horton & Carlile, 2022; Toomey et al., 2013; Simon et al., 2018; Stark & Crofts, 2019). These kids are already vulnerable, not because they are trans, but because of the way that they are treated for being trans. Trans and gender expansive youth have higher rates of anxiety, depression, and trauma (Chodzen et al., 2019; Rimes et al., 2019). More than half of the 16,000 trans and nonbinary youth surveyed in 2022 considered attempting suicide, but youth that reported living in a community that accepted LGBTQ people reported significantly lower rates of attempting suicide (The Trevor Project, 2022). Please understand that this bill won't just make trans youth feel less safe in schools, it will actually make their schools and communities unsafe. This decreased safety will directly and negatively impact their mental health.

Sports teach us important skills like teamwork, competitiveness, leadership, and more. Playing sports has been shown to correlate with positive life outcomes. These outcomes include better grades, greater homework completion rates, higher educational and occupational aspirations, and improved self-esteem. Sports also give us something invaluable, a sense of belonging, which is vital to everyone's well-being.

Every child should belong in Ohio's schools, that is why we urge you not to pass House Bill 6. We are clinical mental health counselors, school counselors, counselor educators, and counselors-in-training. It is our collective professional belief that this will irreversibly harm the mental and emotional well-being of trans, gender expansive, and intersex youth in this state.

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