

**Opponent Testimony against House Bill 6
House Higher Education Committee
19 April, 2023**

**Malia Lewis, Board of Education Member
Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District**

Chairman Young, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the House Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today in opposition to House Bill 6. My name is Malia Lewis and I use she/her pronouns. I am an elected member of the Board of Education of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District. I am the proud parent of two graduates of Heights High who were both athletes in middle and high school.

There are so many aspects and underlying assumptions of House Bill 6 which are wrong, it is hard to know where to start. So let me begin with the only good thing I can think of first: at least this bill no longer contains the prurient and creepy panty check clause of last session's version.

House Bill 6 lumps all levels of sports competition together without regard to the fact that K-12th grade sports and post-secondary college athletics are different animals and serve different purposes. As a school board member, I am here to address the K-12 realm only.

Children play sports whereas young adults compete. The operative word for K-12 children is "play." Children need to play (ask any zero to age 3 educator). And as they grow older and recess disappears from their school day, children can continue to find the joy of play in the more structured arena of sports.

They also find validation in belonging to a team. They develop camaraderie, grit, persistence, responsibility. They learn the rewards of practice and effort. They learn both leadership and humility. They learn both physical and emotional self-control. They learn both self-reliance and how to rely on each other. And they learn whose family hosts the best pasta dinners, which adults will make sure they get home safely, and which adults will motivate them and guide them to be better than they thought they ever could be.

All this has nothing to do with medals, competition, awards, trophies, or scholarships. It has to do with helping children learn to navigate their world, with helping them to grow up confident in their abilities and in their right to exist and take up space in the world.

Now imagine (if you can) that the world you are learning to navigate questions who you are. Imagine (if you can) that your sense of self does not align with how others perceive you from the outside. Then it is even more important to be able to learn all those things which come from participating in sports as you grow up. Adolescence is hard for every child, but it is particularly hard for children whose sense of self does not align with how the outside world perceives them. So why would you deliberately deny the benefits of participating in sports to children who could use those benefits the most?

Transgender kids have the same right to exist, to take up space, and to receive the tools which will help them thrive as everyone else does. Banning them from playing sports is just plain mean.

The Ohio High School Athletics Association, the governing body for intermural sports competition in middle and high school, put in place a policy in 2012 which allows transgender students to experience the benefits of playing sports, without taking anything away from anyone else. This policy is so successful that there has not been a single lawsuit or complaint of unfair competition filed since 2012. My school district, Cleveland Heights-University Heights City Schools, recently worked with OHSAA to ensure that one of our transgender students could play sports at Heights High. The OHSAA policy is working. There is no reason for House Bill 6 to impose additional draconian rules upon children in K-12 sports. This legislation is unnecessary and cruel.

I urge you to vote against House Bill 6.

Thank you.