

(Note attendees Chair Young, Chair Doboss, and Chair Miller)

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Alina Taylor (they/them), hailing from Youngstown, Ohio, an OU grad, a non-profit fundraiser, an advocate for all who need a voice, a sibling, a friend but importantly for today, a trans-athlete.

For my entire high school and good portion of my college career, I struggled with my gender identity. Imagine, being at constant war with yourself on how you viewed yourself in the mirror. Every. Single. Day. Eventually, the weight became too much to bear, and I finally allowed myself to accept my trans identity. I remember the night I told myself. I am trans. I am non-binary. That freedom allowed me to escape the inner battle I had, but only to go onto the war I would inevitably then have with fight others; having to explain, defend, and convince of my gender identity.

Rugby wasn't that war-zone. Like most who go to university, everyone wants to find their niche. Somewhere that they feel like they belong. For me, that organization was club rugby. When I first came out, I struggled to advocate for myself. Constantly shrugging off misgendering I got from professors, fellow classmates, and friends still adjusting to my new pronouns. My closest friend, and fellow rugby teammate Renee, would see and hear me talk about how much this impacted me. I'll never forget when she advocated for me on the pitch.

For those of you who don't understand the nuance of rugby, the pitch is the sacrilegious holy place where "ruggers" have the joy of playing the sport. You go onto the pitch, get beaten and battered, shed blood, sweat and tears, all for the name and glory of the sport. Being the first non-binary trans person on the team, I enjoyed rugby as it was an escape from everyday life. It didn't matter who you were, just if you have love and passion for the game. One day, on the pitch during practice, my friend Renee paused, after hearing me get misgendered by accident by fellow teammates, to then announce: "Taylor's pronouns are they/them, and you should refer them as that. Got it? Got it? Good". When she did this, I was on the ground demonstrating a defensive position, but I never left more uplifted in my life.

From then on, all of my teammates made a conscious and caring effort to respect my gender identify. Rugby became my safe haven, a place where I didn't have to explain myself to be seen for who I am as a person, a player, but most importantly, a friend. The friends I made on that team I confided in when my parents weren't

speaking to me because I was trans. I shared my successes, my failures, and my dreams. Some of those friends I am still very close with today, who I shared my dream of finally receiving gender affirming top surgery, a dream many of them knew I wanted while I was previously on the team.

I can't imagine my life without this sport. This rugby club lovingly brought me in, and continues to do so, trans athletes to join. Rugby has a comradery unlike any other sport. Fellow ruggers understand the dedication and tenacity it takes to play. I encourage you to look at the organization, Rugby For All. This trailblazing organization outlines the transgender inclusivity efforts into the sport, equality and for purely the love of the game. Because at the end of the day, what we do is for the love of sport.

I ask you simply: What right do you have to deny someone of this experience?

I ask you that hearing my voice in opposition of this testimony will have you understand the true right side of this issue and stand with trans athletes in solidarity I ask you vote **NO** on this exclusionary bill called HB 6. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I will now take any questions you may have.