

To the sponsor of this bill, Jena Powell, to the chair of the Higher Education Committee, Tom Young, and to those on the Committee and present in this room:

I don't know what you expect from us. I don't know what you want us to say. This isn't the first bill to be proposed in Ohio that targets transgender people. And much as I and the others who speak here before you today wish, we're worried that it won't be the last. Even as we speak, a bill to take away the rights of Ohioans to receive life-saving gender-affirming care is being contested in this very statehouse. I drove down here from Kent, Ohio, to speak to you today, and I hope these words resonate with you.

I'm not a sports kind of guy. I do fencing and marching band, and that's about it. I never quite understood the allure of things like soccer, lacrosse, football, anything. It's never been my cup of tea, so to speak. And yet, I've gone to middle school wrestling tournaments, I've seen dozens of football games, I've watched hockey matches. Soccer games. Basketball games. It's not for me, personally, so why do I do this? Why do I go attend these things when I have no interest in doing it myself, because I think it's a bit sweaty, painful, or just uninteresting?

Because I know *other people* care about it. That's why I am speaking to you today. Humanity is diverse. There are eight billion of us on this planet. Each one of us has our own experiences, our own likes, dislikes, the little details that make us... *us*. No two people are the same, and that's not a bad thing. I may not like the idea of being on a sports team, but that doesn't mean other people think the same way. Who am I to judge them for their passions? Who are any of us to decide what athletics people can or cannot partake in?

You and I are not the same. No one is. That's the point of being human. It is unjust to make these kinds of sweeping laws about where someone can compete based on arbitrary boxes that some people have laid out for others to fit. My transgender sisters just want to participate in

the sports they love, and there's nothing wrong with that. There should not be any question about whether transgender women would have an "unfair advantage" in women's sports; in fact, transgender athletes have been allowed since 2003 to participate in the Olympics, and if said athletes were smashing records and "dominating" the field, we would know by now. If you state that a transgender woman would have an "unfair advantage" to a cisgender woman, then please, speak to Michael Phelps about how his double-jointed elbows, larger than average wingspan, and longer torso provide him with an "unfair advantage" to his fellow competitors.

I don't want to beg in front of you. I don't want our pleas to fall on deaf ears. I don't want this to amount to nothing. I urge you to feel empathy for us, for the young transgender teenagers who just want to live normal lives. Who want to sign up for sports, who want to be a part of something bigger than them, who want to compete and win. We may not be the same, but we all feel these feelings in some way, shape, or form. We all want to take pride in ourselves, to succeed, to live. I know you've felt this before, at least once in your lives, too. Can you spare the empathy for us and let us experience the same?