

My name is Ash Bateman. I currently live in Cincinnati, OH and am a Social Work student at the University of Cincinnati. I am also a transgender man. Sports have always been a huge part of my life. Throughout elementary school I did track. In Middle School I was a competitive Swimmer. In High School, I continued competitive swimming and also joined the cheer team. Now, in college, I do Gymnastics. It's easy to tell that I love sports.

But throughout my time in sports I have realized something important. The team you are a part of is everything, and having a connection with one another as teammates is crucial to the success of that team. If you do not have that bond with another, you are destined to fail or spiral into misery. Being transgender, it is especially hard to form a connection with a team that does not align with who you are. In my experience, in that situation you're either forced to keep a significant part of yourself hidden or be true to yourself and be isolated from the rest of your teammates.

I was a transgender man on an all girls cheerleading team in high school, and when I tell you it was the most uncomfortable experience I have ever been in, I am not joking. Before gymnastics, cheerleading was my passion but my teammates made it very difficult to stay passionate about it; to show up every day, work my hardest and succeed because I was different. Me being a transgender guy on an all girls cheer team was not only uncomfortable for myself, but my teammates as well. My teammates did not feel comfortable around me and therefore isolated me from the group. This caused a fracture in our team dynamic, and made things worse for everyone, even the coaches.

The thought of this bill passing makes me want to quit gymnastics because I cannot go through that again. I love gymnastics. When I'm out on the mat, all of my worries fade away. I'm the purest form of myself. My gender identity does not matter. I am simply a gymnast.

I urge you not to pass this bill because many others like myself will no longer feel comfortable, safe and validated as a person on their sports team if it does. The thing that we once loved will no longer bring us joy and it will lead many to quit what they have worked hard for for so long. Please, do not pass this bill. You do not have to understand what it is like to be transgender, you don't even have to support me and my fellow community. All we ask is that you recognize us as human beings who have feelings and things we love just like you have activities that you enjoy. Before voting on HB 6 ask yourselves, how would you feel if you were no longer welcome to do your favorite activity?