

**Statement by Brianna Turner, WNBA Player for the Phoenix Mercury,
before the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee
in opposition to House Bill 6**

Dear Chairman Brenner and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee:

My name is Brianna Turner and I play for the Phoenix Mercury. As a Black woman and as an athlete, I have faced many challenges to equity in sport, but I assure you that including transgender women and girls in women's sports is not among those challenges. I am in strong opposition to House Bill 6.

Last year, upon witnessing the absolutely unequal treatment between the women and the men's teams during the NCAA's March Madness tournament, I reached a breaking point. I could not believe what I was seeing – the men had access to a massive gym with fancy equipment, while the woman had free weights and yoga mats. The women received “less food, and of a lower quality and variety, than the men” and the men even received outside sponsors for catering that were not extend to women's teams; the men had access to outdoor space at the height of a pandemic, the women did not; the list goes on and on and is outlined in painstaking detail by the law firm commissioned to do an external audit of all of the NCAA's gender equity practices.¹

At the same time this was happening, dozens of states across the country – including in Ohio – were trying to ban kids from playing sports with their friends, all under the banner of “protecting women's sports.” I was floored. Keeping transgender women and girls out of sports is not protecting me or helping any women athletes. It's not helping the incredibly talented women in the NCAA tournament achieve equal food, lodging, sponsorship or media coverage to the men's teams. It is not doing anything to address gender inequalities that have existed for decades in sports. This bill only contributes to bullying culture for any athlete who does not fit a particular idea of what a woman “should” be, and that is the opposite of the culture we're trying to create in sports. That is why I have joined hundreds of other elite women athletes to consistently express loud opposition to bills identical to HB 6² And that is also why over one thousand college athletes have signed letters supporting letting kids play sports with their friends and against discriminatory bills like HB 6.³

If we want to protect women's sports, we need to address the very real inequities that exist that women and girls are talking about every single day. These include: lack of equal pay for women athletes, far less media coverage of women's sports, and gross disparities in access to resources and facilities, to name only a few. We need equal access to resources, not separation from our teammates and friends. Athletes in women's sports need champions who will address the real problems we face, not distract from those problems by targeting kids who just want to play and be a part of a community. HB 6 is seeking to solve a problem that simply doesn't exist.

¹ See <https://ncaagenderequityreview.com/>

²For example, see:

https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/press_release/billie-jean-king-megan-rapinoe-and-candace-parker-join-nearly-200-athletes-supporting-trans-youth-participation-in-sports/; https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/womens-groups-sign-on-letter-trans-sports-4.1.19.pdf

³ For example, see: <https://www.athlealely.org/student-letter-ncaa-hb500/>; <https://www.athlealely.org/college-athletes-demand-ncaa/>; <https://www.athlealely.org/athlete-ally-letter-trans-nonbinary-ncaa/>

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Basketball has been a part of my life for over 20 years, and I can't imagine who I would be without it. I have so much empathy for transgender youth potentially being banned from sports they love just because they are living as their authentic selves. The kind of cruelty it takes to target kids rocks me to my core. Trans youth — like all youth — need support and care.

I urge you to protect women and girls in sport and oppose HB 6.

Brianna Turner