

House Higher Education Committee

Wednesday, April 26, 2023

Joshua Ferry - Student at Cleveland State University

Opposition Testimony for HB6

Chair Young, Ranking member Miller and members of the committee,

My name is Joshua Ferry. I'm a student at Cleveland State University, and am testifying in opposition to HB6. I'm expressing my opposition towards this bill because it excludes some athletics that female transgender athletes can participate in. While I understand there might be some concerns and advantages for these athletes, there are other, less discriminatory ways of approaching this issue. Before I discuss why I'm opposed to it, I'd like to say that I am neither within the LGBTQ+ community nor am I an athlete.

I'd like to start off by talking about a statistic: per the OHSAA, the number of transgendered athletes in Ohio is a very small amount—with only six (6) trans girls participating in athletics out of the 400,000 athletes in Ohio that participate in 7-12 athletics. Are you really going to exclude 6 athletes, a very small fraction, from playing sports? While the transgender community as a whole is relatively a niche community, allowing them to play could still be a revenue booster for the trans and LGBTQ+ community as a whole in Ohio. I'm not the only one who has expressed hesitation. In a report from the Associated Press, Governor DeWine “questioned the need for banning transgender student-athletes” saying that this issue is “best handled by the leagues and athletic associations”.

There are many trans youth that, because of these nationwide laws, are afraid to play athletics in fear of getting harassed or bullied. One thing that is common among trans adolescence in particular is that they're vulnerable to depression and suicide. A report from

endoctrine.org found that 78.5% of trans youth suffer from depression, as well a history of suicide and thoughts of doing harm to oneself. While the study conducted was among children and adolescence, this is not to say that it ends when the individual gets to college.

For many of these trans youth, having the ability to play a sport and interact with their peers (both those who are trans and not trans) is an escape for many. And while various sports have become more diversified over the years in regards to race and ethnicity, gender, and even disability (Special Olympics, Paralympics), by allowing more trans to participate in sports, it makes it even more diversified. We've already seen many LGBTQ+ athletes—including Megan Rapinoe (lesbian; forward for the U.S. Women's soccer team) and Brittney Griner (lesbian; center for Phoenix Mercury's (WNBA)), as well as various NFL players.

However, while there have started to be more LGBTQ+ athletes, according to The Trevor Project, a non-profit which serves as a crisis line for the LGBTQ+ community, transgender youth have “significantly lower rates of sports participation” compared to their peers, and many of these LGBTQ+ athletes are afraid to publicly express that they're trans. According to the report, 17% of those who reported to the survey identified as transgendered or nonbinary, and were seen “nearly half as likely” to participate in sports compared to their counterparts. Within the three categories reported—nonbinary, gender questioning, and transgender, trans made up the smallest percentage (14%).

If we as a community would like to be more inclusive and “form a more perfect union”, we must be respectful of communities that may be different than our own.

I would like to reiterate that I'm not an expert when it comes to trans athletes, however, there are many that are. These experts, whether they be within the LGBTQ+ community, within collegiate athletics, or both are the best policy advisors on this matter.

Thank you for taking the time to read this

Please feel free to contact me with any questions,

Joshua Ferry

Please consider visiting the following resources referenced within the testimony

1). Trevor Project: LGBTQ Youth Sports Participation

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/lgbtq-youth-sports-participation/>

2). Channel 5 News: Six Transgender girls play sports in Ohio...

-Used to find stat on number of trans athletes in Ohio (per the OHSAA)

<https://www.news5cleveland.com/news/politics/ohio-politics/six-transgender-girls-play-sports-in-ohio-but-gop-wants-them-out>

3). AP article

<https://apnews.com/article/sports-education-ohio-mike-dewine-government-and-politics-4a31272058ad5ae84cd2a531b223f7cf>