

December 4th 2023

Higher Education Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
1 Capitol Square, Columbus, OH 43215

RE: Interested Party to HB 183

Chairman Young, Ranking Member Miller and members of the Ohio House Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 183.

My name is Steven Arness and I am here today to share with you my personal experiences, thoughts and observations on this legislation.

While I may look like a white heterosexual male, I'll reveal to you that I am also THE epitome of microaggressions, bigotry, and discrimination.

In my early thirties I decided to participate in a sport I was fascinated by on TV. First step was equipment, and my first encounter with bias. My equipment choices were black or black, next was clothing and more bias. Off the rack I had three styles to choose from and a color choice of black, grey, white, and/or blue for half my outfit, the other half was black only. Not satisfied with these choices I searched for a seamstress for a custom made outfit and I finally found someone after twenty seven others had told me no.

Next was getting a coach, more bias again as most said no. One said yes if I would restrict my attire not only to when in lessons, but also in my personal life and to the aforementioned options. I said no, I eventually did find a coach, but they didn't continue with me on my second year as they were overwhelmed by the hatred of others belittling them.

The owner the pro shop I would frequent said if I provided them with a picture, they would put it up next to the other pictures of their customers. After six photo studios told me no, a friend of mine told me they knew someone who could accommodate me. Visiting the shop one day the owner told me people kept knocking my picture off the wall. In fact, some customers would call ahead and ask for my picture to be taken down before they entered the store.

What pray tell your may ask caused these people to act this way? You see, the sport I chose was ice skating or more specific, figure skating. And the attire I most often chose to wear was a traditional figure skating dress, suntan tights, and I presented as myself.

In fact I was told to leave a place of public accommodations for dressing the same way as other females had the freedom to do. When I asked the Ohio Civil Rights Commission to look into this. The defendant blatantly admitted that I would not have been kicked out if I was a women. And while the commission did agree that I was discriminated against based on sex, they denied me conciliation and closed the case.

For me, I needn't worry of which restroom I've been told I'm supposed to use as sometimes I can't even get in the building.

And that's where the problem lies.

I went to watch an ice skating competition, a young girl and I presume her dad entered. I watched as it took him two tries before he found a woman to take his daughter into the girls locker room to get changed. A little while later I saw a woman show up with I presume her son and they both walked straight into the men's bathroom/boys changing room without hesitation.

One day while watching practice, a mom of a skater I skated with said the lady next to her said it was odd for a man by himself to be watching young girls. She told the lady, "Oh, that's Steven, he's more interested in the dress than the girl in the dress."

At learn to skate a little girl asked me to tie her skates, I told her no, she asked why, I said I couldn't, she asked why not? After a few more back and forth, she finally left and sought help elsewhere. I know how to tie skates, but I let others who feared me stop me from being kind. In retrospect, people should fear those that fear me.

A Cleveland news reporter lead a story of a boys lost backpack with "Police on the search, but not for a wanted man."

There are no organizations that stand behind or next to me, instead I have individuals and organizations that do nothing. And while they embody female freedom, they write rules to restrict mine and other males freedom of which they do with relative impunity and no repercussions.

This all re-enforces the stereotype that men are to be feared. I am a white heterosexual male, yet face the same actions taken against other minorities, but with no support and over a simple piece of fabric.

Thank You for your time,

Steven Arness

Additional pages and references located omitted due to file size, the original testimony can be found here,

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/tnhcqa4zlgm2yo7e8pyo1/Steven-Arness-231204-HB183-Testimony.pdf?rlkey=njjmetxhuksg9jw2ip4slzoss&dl=0>