

My name is Julie Day, and like many people, I have a lot of labels. Wife. Step-Mom. Aunt. Woman. Athlete. Trans.

I am currently the Director of Finance and IT/IS of Kaleidoscope Youth Center and a Captain of the Columbus Chaos Women's Tackle Football Team. I have had a wealth of experience at the intersections of what this bill and its sponsors are targeting, and I do not think it comes as a surprise that I vehemently oppose this bill.

I will not stand here and tell you all the statistics and peer reviewed research that contradicts this bill. I will not stand here and tell you what the research says will happen to the young people if these bills pass. There are far more qualified people to speak on those factors for you to ignore. Instead, I would like to tell you a story.

My experiences are all too common in my community. By all accounts, I had a normal childhood. Dad worked, was commissioner of the baseball league, and the head coach for all our teams. Mom stayed home and raised us, was head of the PTO, and took the stats while organizing everything else. Their boys played football and baseball, their girl was a cheerleader and a gymnast. From the outside, it was the All-American household. Except for one aberration. I knew when I was 5 years old that I was not a boy. I was a girl. I also knew at 5 years old that my parents did not approve of what I knew.

Mom was the more religious one. Always made sure we abided by the rules we were given. "Don't make me tell your dad" was the threat of the household that got any of us into obedience. My father was much less religious, but far more fanatical in his beliefs. He had a favorite "joke" used to tell his friends: "I don't have a whole lot of rules for how my kids grow up, but there is one that they know by heart. If any of my kids are gay, I'll take them to the garage and beat them with a 2x4 until they're straight." After the laughter died down, forced laughter in rare cases, some voice inevitably asks "and what if they're still gay?" The air always felt heavier in those moments, in those spaces where it became apparent that this was not just macho bluster, but a promise. "Then I keep swinging until the problem is solved. I'd rather have a dead kid than a gay one."

As we got older, he would have us tell his "joke" on his behalf. A sort of cruel call and response to make sure we knew the promises he was making. It is times like these, hearing the proponents of this bill, hearing the words they say and the thoughts they have and the promises they are telling the world, where I feel myself teleported back in time. I feel myself standing in that scared little girl's shoes, with the knowledge that the people who are supposed to protect you, care for you, love you unconditionally, are the biggest threats to your happiness and to your existence. When I was 32, I came out via letter. My family has not seen me since, because I remember the promises that were made to me.

The one thing that still ties me to the life before, other than the scars and the therapy bills, is football. It is hard to explain to someone who has never played the sport just why it is such a draw for us. In high school, I played as someone who wasn't me. I was playing the role of captain of the high school football team. It's a great cover for someone who was hiding a secret as big as mine was. Being good at the sport certainly didn't hurt the matter either. While I had some opportunities to continue playing in college, I didn't feel like I could keep up the act as I had before. It was slipping, and it was only a matter of time before it caught up to me. I said my goodbyes to the sport, not knowing I would be back on the gridiron in just over 15 years. This time, as who I really am.

I knew about the Columbus Comets, and I knew that the Chaos had sprung up from those ashes. I heard people like me lambasted on the news, social media, and South Park. I heard sports radio hosts talk about how dangerous people like me are and how much the testosterone in our bodies has made us into unstoppable athletes in between ads for low T centers that portrayed men with low testosterone as being weaker than their wives. I read the science, and the studies. I knew from my own experience at how much my body, my strength, my athletic capabilities had changed since I started hormone therapy. I knew in the eyes of many, that none of that mattered. I also knew that those people did not care about fairness or women. I knew that they never talked about women's sports unless it was the Olympics or a trans woman was involved. I knew that it never crossed their minds to support any of the myriad of women's pro, semi-pro, and amateur sports teams in the area. I know that many people hearing this now have never heard of the Columbus Chaos before.

So, almost a year ago to this day, I tried out. I gave it my all. I was open about who I am and what I have been through from the jump. I did all the things that one in my position is required to do: all the blood tests, the forms, making sure all my information was up to date. I braced myself to be rejected, to be ostracized, to be sent away. I was not. I was welcomed with open arms. These women, who knew the circumstances I brought with me, accepted me as their own in ways I could not believe. This diverse group of women from all walks of life made me feel more safe and secure in who I am than I ever have before. We practiced, fought, won, lost, experienced amazing highs and devastating lows as not just a team, but a family. For a lot of us, the field is a place for us to escape all the things we are dealing with in our day-to-day life. We all get to set that aside for a few hours on a Saturday night to go play football with our sisters. The past 12 months has been the best sports experience of my life. Being able to just be myself, and for my teammates to see me for who I am, has blown everything I thought I knew about being part of a team out of the water. This is the quintessential experience of sports and athletics. To deny this experience to any young woman, even one who happens to be trans, is nothing other than cruel.

In conclusion, we should not be here today. We should not be wasting the time and resources of our government to cause harm to young people. We should not have to have safe spaces for the people who are being targeted by hate and bigotry. We should not have to be worried that a governing body will tell us that we cannot do the things we love with the people who love us. These people understand the promises you make by passing this bill. Unfortunately, there will also be many that you will never see again.