

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Jones, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 23. My name is Luis Blanco and I am from Spain. I moved to Ohio two years ago, and I have since been attending Columbus Academy, during my stay here I have done two seasons of Track, Cross Country and Swimming so far. I came to America because I wished to prepare myself for the future, as I wanted to eventually study in college here, but also because I would have the opportunity to play sports and make new friends. Unfortunately, that has not been possible since my arrival here. Though I have made a lot of friends, such as Grant, my experience in sports has been detrimental to international students. In a sense, part of the high-school American experience is lost due to this incapacity to compete.

I also feel like this incapacity to compete segregates international students who have applied for academics, preventing them in being fully included in their teams. They might miss after-meet parties or pre-meet breakfast with the team. For example, though I have been practicing, I still miss going with my team to meets and hanging out after competing. Experiences like these discourage international students from playing sports since they feel like their contributions to the team don't matter.

I haven't had the chance to experience competing in the US, with my friends, but I hope that my testimony here today can help change that. I hope that other students that have come to the US to immerse themselves in the culture here and to thrive academically have the opportunity to do so.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.