



Senator Theresa Gavarone

2nd Ohio Senate District

Sponsor Testimony for Senate Bill 288

Senate Education Committee

June 9, 2020

Chairman Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor and my colleagues on the Senate Education Committee, I have mixed emotions while standing before you today. I pride myself on my communication with my constituents and many of my bills, like this one, come directly from those conversations. However, I am disappointed because I never thought I would need to be before this committee or any other to right such an egregious wrong.

Senate Bill 288 will prohibit any school, organization or athletic conference from adopting a rule, bylaw, or any other regulation that creates an obstruction to wearing religious apparel when competing in interscholastic athletics.

This issue garnered national and even international attention after my constituent, Noor Abukaram, a runner for Sylvania Northview was disqualified from a cross country race last year because, unbeknownst to her, she was not granted permission to compete in her hijab. Noor will be up next to testify in support of the legislation and instead of me giving the entire story, I would prefer that you hear it directly from her.

As I mentioned, this became a viral story last October. When I read about it, I was simply stunned. I learned that the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) was considering a change to the rule and I was hoping the issue would be resolved that way. Unfortunately, during my meeting with Noor and her mom in my district, I learned that the rule was still burdensome.

I am excited for you all to meet Noor during the next hearing. I have been fortunate enough in my time as a legislator and mom to meet a lot of great kids with exciting futures ahead of them. Noor is no exception. And as even Noor acknowledges, this bill isn't just about her or the expression of her own faith. This bill is about ALL student-athletes who desire to compete in their sport while expressing their religious beliefs. Noor and I are fighting to ensure that no student-athlete in this state ever has to feel the way she did back in October.

To be perfectly clear, I am not interested in ridiculing or demonizing the OHSAA. They are an organization that does a lot of good for our students and communities. I do not believe there was any malicious intent whatsoever by the creation of the original or current rules. I simply think that in regards to this rule, they were wrong and still are wrong.

Chairman Lehner, thank you for granting me the chance to testify before your committee and I would be happy to answer any questions members may have.