

Good Afternoon,

First I'd like to thank you all for the opportunity share my story today

At the cross country District Invitationals in 2019, my teammates and I went to the starting line to get checked in as usual. They checked our jerseys and accessories to make sure no one violated the uniform. Everything went smoothly.

I cleared my head and stepped up to the starting line, ready to race.

After a very difficult race, I achieved a personal record. My teammates and I celebrated, learning that we qualified for regionals. We rushed to check our individual placings. I ran my finger down the list and quickly noticed that my name was not on the scoreboard next to my teammates' names. I was certain that it was just an error.

My teammates then looked at me in all seriousness and told me that I have been disqualified. When I inquired about the reason behind the disqualification, one of the girls responded, "Because of your hijab."

Cross Country was a means for me to leave my troubles behind, but this felt like the complete opposite. Full of emotions, I wanted to hide away in my room and let the time pass. My older sister reminded me that our younger sister's journey in athletics has just begun, and her being the next hijabi athlete in the Abukaram household, she, and all future minority athletes, will have to endure the same type of discrimination that I have dealt with.

Considering this, I decided to tell my story. My experience quickly gained global uproar being featured in The Washington Post, The New York Times, Good Morning America, Time Magazine, CNN, Sports Illustrated, ESPN, and many more.

Since then, my "unique" circumstance suddenly became a common reality. I received many messages from people around the world who had faced similar discrimination. I came to the realization that most athletes who face discrimination do not have the opportunity to share their experiences.

This empowered me to start the Let Noor Run (LNR) initiative, which aims to "fight discrimination and injustices that hinder us from doing what we love."

We hosted our LNR kickoff event in January, 2020, which aimed to host different dialogues within the sports community to further educate and shed light on discrimination in sports.

We raised money for schools to be equipped with sports hijabs for hijabi athletes to make sports more inclusive in Ohio schools

I visited Ohio schools to speak to young kids about discrimination and civic participation

I fought diligently for my right to run in a hijab. I testified in the senate over a year ago for SB 288 and then again in May to testify for SB 181.

And today I am here again testifying for the same bill. Because even with all the work I've done,

during the 2020 cross country season and the 2021 track season I experienced more race day anxiety than ever before.

I remember as I was walking on the bus for my first cross country meet of the season stopping in my tracks to turn around to ask my mom if I was gonna be okay at this meet referring to my hijab.

As a family who are heavily involved in athletics per usual my mom pulled out the rule book. We learned that I don't need a waiver but whether or not I race is under the discretion of the official.

I went on throughout the season with no problems.

In April 2021 at a track meet in Amherst, Ohio as I was waiting on the starting line during my mile relay for my teammate to approach for my handoff. The official approached me and asked if I had my waiver, I confidently told him I don't need one, he proceeded to tell me I do and that he'll let me go this time.

By this time my teammate was finishing her fourth lap. My heart was racing, my hands were shaking and tears started running down my face as I got handed the baton. I ran a PR and finished the race still shaking.

At the checkin of my second race of the day, I was asked for a waiver by a different official.

At that point, I knew that there was still a lot of work to be done regardless of a "rule change" ; it was insufficient and insulting.

This committee has expressed concerns about why legislation is needed to remedy an issue that can be addressed by the OSHAA. I hope to clarify why a rule change in itself is insufficient in ameliorating the problem.

Rule books are subject to change as OSHAA has proven over the past 2 years. Since my story went viral OSHAA has changed the rule book simply to disprove my narrative. Which is why it is important to be protected by law from the bias of OSHAA officials, and the unfair enforcement of those rules.

In October 2019 there was no written requirement for a waiver for religious head wear; it was an unwritten rule that was enforced on students at the discretion of the official.. As an athlete I follow the written rules for my sport.

In October 2019 At the time of my disqualification the rules state "A competitor who competes with an illegal uniform shall be disqualified, following a proper warning allowing the competitor the opportunity to correct the error," after my disqualification the rule was changed and states, "If officials have concerns about the headgear, contest officials shall approach the head coach (or assistant coach) prior to competition. OFFICIALS SHOULD NEVER CONFRONT THE COMPETITOR FOR EXPLANATION OR CLARIFICATION." This was an opportunity that I was denied at the time of my disqualification. It is not sufficient to change a rule only when someone like myself is negatively impacted and attention is drawn to a specific incident.

Rather, preventative measures, such as in the form of this bill, should be taken to ensure that rule changes after the fact are not the only form of protection students have. Furthermore, rules will always be subject to change which means that broader protections must be put in place.

As an athlete I put my faith in the organizations to make the rule book fair and unbiased. These changes, however, still allow a personal bias to supersede the spirit of the sport. With SB 181 I'm confident organizations in the state of Ohio will start to work towards a more inclusive experience for all interscholastic activities.

I have only spoken of the events that took place this past April twice.

During my testimony for the senate and today in front of you all. I stand before you today, hat in hand, or should I say hijab, asking you all to be champions of religious expression and protection and support this bill.

With all my advocacy efforts and engagement with young athletes across Ohio over the past two years, it would be a disservice to the Ohio athletic community and the negative experiences I've been through if this bill is not passed. Therefore, I urge you to support SB 181.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to me today. I am happy to take any questions that the committee may have.