



**Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 181 - *Student Religious Expression-Athletics*
Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Nazek Hapasha, MPA - League of Women Voters of Ohio
May 25, 2021**

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee: Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Nazek Hapasha, program associate at the League of Women Voters of Ohio, and I am proud and honored to testify in support of SB 181 on behalf of the League of Women Voters.

The League of Women Voters believes that the government has the responsibility to provide equality of opportunity for education for all persons in the United States regardless of their religion. ([Read LWV's full position on equality of opportunity.](#)) The League has a long history in advocating for equitable school funding, and more recently for programs that would establish equal opportunity for girls and women in education and in school athletics. We are excited at the opportunity to employ the League's policy positions in advocating for equality in sports for all Ohio's children, regardless of religious practice or expression.

Children readily identifiable as a religious minority have been barred from sports competitions in Ohio or have been burdened with excessive regulations at the whim of sports officials without reason. This often tragically prevents young children from even trying to participate in sports and makes them feel ostracized. As a Muslim woman myself, who has spent more than 15 years working with young people of all ages in the Muslim community, I can personally testify to the immense value that this bill brings to Ohio's children. Muslim American children can sometimes face immense bias and racism which causes them to struggle with their identity, often leading to long term mental and emotional health problems.¹ Many studies have found, however, that experiences through sports which allow for children of different backgrounds to meaningfully interact helps to overcome implicit biases and racist stereotypes.² Additionally, sports are critical to the development of children. Participation in sports not only helps ensure good physical health, but is an excellent way to foster social, emotional, and mental health in children. It has been found to be an especially helpful tool in promoting the self-worth and self-esteem of children who are of different racial and religious minorities.^{1,3}

¹ [InternalizedIslamophobia_ShOmar_Dec2016.pdf \(yaqeeninstitute.org\)](#)

² [St. Mary's Law professor examines how sports can help combat racism in the U.S. \(stmarytx.edu\)](#)

³ [Sports Participation and Positive Correlates in African American, Latino, and White Girls \(nih.gov\)](#)

Barriers to participation in sports must be removed. I ask you to consider my testimony and vote yes on this important piece of legislation that will promote inclusivity and is vital to the education, health, and well-being of all children in Ohio. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio was formed in May 1920 out of Ohio's woman suffrage movement. The League is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League has over 4000 members and 32 local Leagues across the Buckeye State.