

Dear reader,

Thank you for reading my testimony today. I want to begin by saying that my greatest hesitation in testifying is knowing how it will affect athletes of the LGBTQIA+ community. I know that I don't understand the obstacles they have overcome in their lives, and can't speak to their individual situations. I can only speak from my own experiences, and so that is what I would like to do today.

My sports background is mixed. I grew up doing Ballet, Tap and Jazz dancing, Cheerleading, Soccer and Gymnastics. I eventually began running Cross Country and Track and that is where I really fell in love. I had the chance to pursue running in college at Ohio State where I competed in Cross Country and Track for four years. The opportunities I received through this chance have continued to this day. While in college, I not only had the chance to compete at a higher level than I ever had with dedicated staff who truly pushed me to be my best, but I had the chance to meet some of the people who would serve as my rocks for college and beyond. The relationships I made with my teammates are relationships that have continued to this day and have been truly indispensable in my life. Had I not had the opportunity to compete in college, I don't know where I would be today.

I realize that even if males had been competing alongside me, I may have still been able to compete in college. I have contemplated if my voice matters here because after all, would anything have changed for me if a male athlete had beat me? Do I really have a dog in this fight? I have considered, and I think my value here is speaking for female athletes to keep athletics fair for everyone. I know that my opinion is just one among many and I know that many will disagree with me, but I hope to present my thoughts with the highest level of respect to all athletes.

I don't personally believe that I have the right or ability to tell anyone how they identify when it comes to being a man or a woman. That is something that is personal and that no one can determine for us. As you are someone who has studied this bill, what I am about to write might be something you already know, so I apologize if this is redundant, but I was taught that "man" and "woman" refer to gender while "male" and "female" refer to sex. I was taught that gender is a societal construct while sex is biological. From my understanding, I can identify as a man or a woman depending on what my society or culture defines those categories to be, but I can't identify as male or female because those categories refer to having XX or XY chromosomes which are physical and go beyond cultural definitions.

I believe that while there is a large non-physical aspect to athletics, there is also a crucial physical side to them. I believe that in many cases, males are biologically superior to females when it comes to physicality, and should therefore be in separate competing classes.

When I was in high school, I had the chance to be part of the 3200 meter relay team. One day in a discussion with my teammates, we realized that a male teammate of

ours could run his 3200 meter race faster than we could run our relay. It was the same distance, and yet he could beat all four of us when he was running both miles on his own and we were running just 800 meters as quickly as we could. We didn't feel threatened by this. We knew that he was a male and that in general, he should be much faster than us.

Similarly, when I was in college, I would run with one of my male teammates during the summers. We would begin together, then he would take off to run the meat of his run on his own at a faster pace, and then return to me for a cool down at my pace. Or, once he ran with me for a workout in which my workout pace was his normal-run pace. We were competing at the same level, but he was faster naturally because he was a male. I wasn't bothered by him being faster or threatened by it because I knew he was just physically different from me.

I believe that we are each created to be uniquely who we are, and that one part of that unique person is our biology. I think in many athletic competitions, to compete against people who share a different biology from you is a denial of this unique personhood. I believe it can be harmful to both parties involved.

My heart goes out to all those who will be impacted by this bill on all sides. I hope that with it will come help for any student who faces a mental or physical struggle from it. But I believe that this bill will bring more fairness and equality to the world of sports.

I want all people to be able to compete fairly in the sports of their choosing. I don't believe that males competing against females allows for that fair space. Sports are a universal language that bring joy, unity, increased quality of life and so much more to so many. I want this space to be fair and completely available to all. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Kaitlyn Willette