

Chair Young, Vice Chair Dobos, and members of the House Higher Education Committee, my name is Cole-Finley Nelson and I am here today because I want to be heard. I want to disturb you into action; to provide perspective from the vantage of someone who will be forced to personally bear the repercussions of this bill, not just the perspective of those with power, who will sign as unaffected parties.

I am here to demand that you recognize the intrinsic human value in trans lives and oppose House Bill 6, along with other bills that aim to erase our existence through mass extinction, such as HB8 and HB68.

I want the minorities you are targeting, who are so frequently silenced, to see we have a voice, and we will never stop fighting.

I am a member of the trans community who is tired of being afraid to exist. I refuse to allow current and future generations of trans people to feel the same.

Trans youth deserve the chance to become trans adults.

While this bill is aimed to exclude trans youth from participation in sports, the broader implications involve the entirety of their lives and belonging.

We cannot address the injustice of one area without acknowledging the repercussions in others as well.

Since statistics, science, and facts do not seem to bear any weight in the passage of these bills, I present you instead with my personal story. A story I do not share lightly and which I actively hide from my family.

The risk of talking openly about this is necessary though, so I need you to hear me now. I have endured severe physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse, along with relentless ridicule from peers, and discrimination rooted solely in my identity as a trans-masculine person.

These attacks have come from the hands of family, those I thought were friends, and various “professionals” since coming out. The most recent one was a 23 minute long beating at the hands of my father that I did not think I was going to survive, leaving marks on me for over six weeks, and is continuing to cause pain even now as I stand here today.

These bills are presented to exploit fear, a common tactic used by people with small minds to destroy individualism by restraining self-expression. It does not work to change a person; it results in death.

I have been threatened with and put on a bus for conversion therapy and undergone many priest’s attempts of exorcism. I have been forced into situations to “reinstate normalcy” in my thoughts, with intentional efforts taken to beat me into submission.

The bruises and pain heal, but the emotional effect of knowing you are seen as a mistake, that you are rejected, and being told it would be better to see you die as their “little girl” than become who you are today, those things don’t fade.

Those words are branded into my soul.

I am willing to accept that I have endured the beatings, the slurs and hate messages, because I know they don’t define me now, but I am not willing to see these things inflicted onto others.

Competitive sports were pivotal for me while growing up. At seven years old I was recruited onto my older brother’s football team, because I could throw a tighter spiral than any of the other teammates (my assigned sex being conveniently overlooked because the benefits of winning outweighed the rules at the time), and I continued playing on the “boys’ team” up until double digits.

When at ten I was told, for the first time, that I could not join the boy's baseball team because of my assigned sex, I spiraled deeper into self-hatred for the body I inhabited, which did not reflect who I was.

With this denial of access, my only healthy outlet and moments of safety were revoked, leaving me to direct my energy into self-destruction.

Sports are more than just battles to declare a winner among many, they are spaces of community and escape. They are an outlet for energy that is otherwise often turned inward in damaging and dangerous ways. Through sports there are opportunities for growth and freedom, where the stress and fear of the world do not touch.

At 9 years old I had turned to taking blades against my skin multiple times a day to find safety, control, and comfort in being the one to hurt myself, instead of others being the only ones with that power. Imagine what it is like for the only time you feel safe to be when you are watching blood spill out from your own skin. Now, I am left with scars lining my body, citing the reasons I turned to self-harm. Reminding me that the world does not want to see me thrive. That people like you do not even want to see those like me survive; declaring the hate you are inflicting and encouraging against me and my community through consideration of these bills.

Simply the experience of hearing these bills being tossed around with the potential of passing into law is already enough to cause immense distress and harm. I am asking you to oppose HB6- do not let this go a step further.

The passage of this bill will be an unforgivable act.