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April 19, 2023

Ohio House Higher Education Committee
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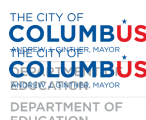
Chairman Young, Ranking Member Miller and members of the Ohio House Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 6. My name is Mallory Golski, and I use she/her pronouns. During the day, I'm the civic engagement and advocacy manager for Kaleidoscope Youth Center, Ohio's largest and longest standing organization serving and supporting LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults, ages 12-24.

But, during the evenings – and most weekends – I'm a swim coach here in Columbus. I started coaching a decade ago, and over the years, I've coached swimmers from preschool to high school and I've taught swim lessons to people ages 2 to 75. I swam competitively when I was growing up, and I currently swim on a Masters team here in Columbus.

For about two years, I've gotten to coach a swimmer who's transgender. Instead of having the experience of competing with her high school, this swimmer continues to swim for our team, which is incredibly welcoming of *all* athletes and is part of a league that has less restrictive guidelines for allowing transgender athletes to compete. I'll never forget the day I first saw her show up to practice wearing a girl's practice suit instead of a boy's suit. Before any other practice, this swimmer would leave her sweats on until the last second. When she was out of the water, she went right to her towel – then to her clothes, which went right back on. It wasn't unusual to see her slouching, with her arms over her chest.

On this day, however, she was already dressed for practice when I arrived. She struck a pose, beaming as she showed off her blue suit with a colorful floral print. It was clear that she was feeling at home in her body and more like herself than she had ever felt around the pool.

It's hard for any young athlete (especially swimmers, who aren't wearing much!) to not play the comparison game and worry that having a different body type than their peers might make them less athletic – let alone someone who's transgender, who worries that their body makes



them not fit in at *all*. There's some legitimacy to this: Having a particular body type *could* lead to some competitive advantages. Look at Michael Phelps, whose 6'4" stature, 6'7" wingspan, unusually flexible ankles and body that produces less lactic acid than others' *does* help him to be a better swimmer. But most young athletes – even those who are transgender and aren't on hormones – aren't at a point where physiological differences make a big difference in their performance, if any at all. I see this all the time: In swimming, unlike most other sports, athletes of all ages, genders and ability levels are all in the pool at the same time. I can name many instances when I've coached cisgender female athletes who are faster than their cisgender male peers of the same age. I can also tell you that I *still* often swim in a lane alongside a cisgender man who is exactly one foot taller than me, and I can still kick his butt in practice. **Assuming that all people who were assigned male at birth will naturally be stronger, faster or generally more athletic than those assigned female at birth is insulting to all female athletes – cisgender and transgender alike.**

Despite having been assigned male at birth, the swimmer I've spoken about has similar – if not a little slower – times in most events compared to the cisgender female swimmers her age. Although she isn't the fastest on our team, she was voted to be one of our two captains for the upcoming season. It's clear that everyone on the team looks up to her, and for good reason: She is the definition of a brave leader, an authentic role model, and a genuine friend. But, don't just take it from me – here's what one of her cisgender female teammates wrote about her:

"I have this one friend who is transgender and they make practice a lot more exciting. They even started wearing a one piece swimsuit, which takes a lot of courage to do. [This swimmer] is always cheering people on and putting in their all for practice. They challenge me to work hard. She deserves to be able to swim because she's an amazing person. It doesn't matter what their gender is, what matters is that they are working hard, benefiting themselves and those around them have the opportunity to play a sport and have fun doing so."

– 14-year-old cisgender female swimmer and teammate of a trans female swimmer

Transgender girls are girls, and they deserve the chance to be role models on their teams.

Now, I'd like to read a quote from another 14-year-old transgender female swimmer, whom I've met through my work at KYC. I don't get to coach this swimmer, because she practices with her high school. But, I sure wish I did. She said,

"I started swimming in the 6th grade. I came out in 7th grade. I wasn't on the team that year because, ya know, 2020. I was coming back last year, and that's when I was first starting to know about how there was so much about trans women in sports. I was just so confused



because I was the slowest on my team. So I was just like, in what way is this unfair, exactly? You'd never think the person that's slowest on the team would be the one that's talked about the most.

"Whenever my school would do awards for stuff, I couldn't get recognized by them because I wasn't competing officially. To get varsity, I think you have to go to 75% of practices and meets. I go to 95% of practices. I wasn't even going to the standard 4 p.m. practices. I was going to practice at 6 o'clock IN THE MORNING. But, I don't go to any of the meets. My coach told me that if I was going to swim in meets, I'd have to swim as a boy in an approved boy's suit. I have been on a waitlist to get puberty blockers for almost two years. If I had started that sooner, I would've been swimming in meets by now. So, I ultimately can't get my varsity letter.

"My coach lets me swim events in practice. Last year, my 50 freestyle time dropped from 1:15 to 45 seconds. My swim coach hasn't seen that kind of improvement in a really long time. But, it's only recorded on a piece of paper that's going to be lost. Someone else got the award for most improved, and they only dropped 10 seconds. It's really frustrating.

"My teammates get angry on my behalf, and there's not much that they can do. But, where they can, they do try to support me.

"Just because you're trans doesn't mean you're going to be better at it. Just because you were born a boy, doesn't mean you're going to be more athletic. That's just misogyny with extra steps. It also implies that trans women are men."

– 14-year-old transgender female swimmer from Central Ohio

I don't know if any of you have ever jumped into a cold pool at 6 a.m., but I have. And I can't imagine the dedication it must take to show up day after day, knowing that my hard work would go entirely unrecognized. ANY team would be lucky to have someone so passionate about the sport as part of their group. This swimmer hopes to compete under the current OHSAA guidelines for transgender athletes later in her high school swimming career, but that opportunity could be taken from her entirely if House Bill 6 passes – or if House Bill 68, which is being heard down the hall, passes. (But, that's testimony for another day.)

Transgender girls are girls, and they deserve the chance to compete for their best times and receive recognition for their hard work.

Okay, so these two swimmers I've talked about work hard, but they aren't the best of the best. What about someone like Lia Thomas? Many proponents of this bill have brought up Lia Thomas' 2022 NCAA Division I championship win in the 500 freestyle. While that incredible



victory is well-earned and deserving of celebration, I'd like to point out that Lia – who's transgender – was still about 9 seconds SLOWER than Katie Ledecky – a *cisgender* Olympic gold medalist and world record holder – who has held the NCAA Division I record in the 500 freestyle since 2017.

Even transgender athletes competing at the *elite* collegiate levels aren't guaranteed to shatter records. **Transgender women are women, and they deserve the chance to compete at all levels of competition alongside their cisgender female peers.**

There's already a thorough (if not *overly* thorough) OHSAA policy in place, and transgender girls are not taking away opportunities from cisgender athletes. Please don't take away opportunities from *them*. Vote no on this legislation and any other legislation that would discriminate against transgender Ohioans.

