

Chairman Young, ranking member Miller and members of the committee, my name is Rev. Jacqui Buschor, pastor of The Church on Oakland Park in the North Linden neighborhood of Columbus. I'm here to testify in opposition to HB6.

I was raised in Celina, Ohio and, like in many communities around our state, there were two things that were constants in the rhythm of our community life - Sunday morning church and Friday night football. Every fall, high school football games were the cornerstone of community culture - the place where people gathered to root for our team. And honestly, at least while I was in school, that team wasn't even that great. Our women's volleyball team, though, won state championships several years running, and when they returned home after state tournament games, they, too, would be greeted with a hero's welcome. The reality is - regardless of the sport - whether they were having winning seasons or not - in our small town, and many like ours, athletes are local superstars. Playing a sport doesn't only offer the chance to belong to a team. It is a chance to belong to and to be supported by an entire community.

HB6 has been named the "Save Women's Sports Act." If we are serious about saving anything, should it not - first and foremost - be saving the lives of young people in our state? Suicide rates among all youth are up 30% over the past decade. And LGBTQIA+ youth are at 45% higher risk for suicide than others. Yet research has shown that participating in middle and high school sports can significantly decrease the rates of depression and suicidal ideation in youth. Depression by 25% and suicidal ideation by 12%.¹ These are significant reductions in one of the top threats to the lives of young Ohioans.

Why would we ever choose to withhold a tool so effective at keeping kids alive and mentally well from any child in our state, let alone those who are at the highest risk of depression and self-harm?

As a faith leader, I am not here to suggest that the church has always been on the right side of this issue. Historically, we have not. And even today, it's true that we do not all agree. But I do believe, as people of faith, there is one thing we can all agree on; God's love is for everyone, without condition and without discrimination. And, as people of faith, we are called to build the kinds of communities that reflect God's love for all those around us.

Yet HB6 sends a very different message - not just to LGBTQIA+ youth, but to all youth of our state - Ohio is not for everyone. HB6 is - at its core - a discrimination bill. Instead of creating opportunities for young people to feel a deeper, life-saving sense of belonging in their schools and in their communities, HB6 leaves the most vulnerable of our youth feeling more isolated, targeted, and vilified.

As a faith leader, I believe God's dream for us is much grander than this. I believe that the dream God has for us is wide enough - expansive and abundant enough - for *all* people to have

¹ Taliaferro LA, Rienzo BA, Miller MD, Pigg RM Jr, Dodd VJ. High school youth and suicide risk: exploring protection afforded through physical activity and sport participation. J Sch Health. 2008 Oct;78(10):545-53. doi: 10.1111/j.1746-1561.2008.00342.x. PMID: 18808474.

room to grow and the encouragement and support to live fully into all God has called them to be. As people of faith, if we take seriously our call to join God in building the kind of world God dreams for us, we must start from a place of love and acceptance for all, just as God does. For this reason, I encourage you to vote NO on HB 6 and any other legislation that seeks to isolate and exclude vulnerable youth rather than supporting communities of life-saving belonging to all young Ohioans. Thank you and I welcome any additional questions.