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House of Representatives

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Vice Ranking Member Summer Lee Subcommittee on Health Care and Financial Services Hearing on “The Importance of Protecting Female Athletics and Title IX” December 5, 2023

Thank you, Madam Chair.

It’s disappointing to me that although the title of this hearing implies a much-needed discussion we’re likely going to be forced to listen to transphobic bigotry.

Because actually protecting female athletes and Title IX is important. Participating in sports provides so many benefits to our young people.

These benefits range from improved mental and physical health to enriched life skills, such as teamwork and goal setting. In terms of mental health, studies show that participating in youth sports is associated with lower rates of anxiety and depression, lower amounts of stress, higher self-esteem and confidence, and reduced risk of suicide.

So why are my Republican colleagues working so hard to prevent our trans youth from participating?

According to the Human Rights Campaign, in just the first 143 days of 2023, elected officials across the nation introduced more than 520 anti-LGBTQI+ bills in state legislatures.

Twenty-three states ban trans youths from participating in school sports consistent with their gender identity, with some laws focusing on kids as young as kindergarten.

How competitive is kindergarten?

You all are working so hard at excluding and demonizing a bunch of kids.

I think it’s important that we raise the voices of transgender athletes, their families, and teammates.

I’d like to read a few of their stories, written in the first person.

From CeCe Telfer, Professional track athlete, model, and advocate:

“I was a former D2 national champion in the 400 m hurdles. And I am now a professional athlete training to make it on the team USA and represent them in the following Olympics to come.

Sports have given me a plethora of things, but mainly Sports have given me strength, taught me how to overcome fear, and stand up when defeated. Sports have given me collaborative skills that was developed throughout the years of being an athlete and having teammates. Sports taught me how to stay focused and committed. Along with the necessary skills that sports has taught me and giving me clarity and freedom.

Transgender women and girls – transgender people – are not a threat. We don't play sport to cheat. We deserve the rights as any other woman because that's what we are. There are rules and regulations that define our ability to compete.

The narrative that builds on myself and trans kids in the community is negative and dehumanizing. It feels as though people don't want us to exist, and in order to change the narrative because we do exist, and we're not gonna stop existing, we need to stop these anti-trans bills. They are dehumanizing and kids are dying. Instead, I believe the government should step up and support trans people on all levels to show that we are seen and we have rights and are people just like everybody else.

From Ember, a transgender female high school softball player:

"When I was younger, I played coed baseball. I loved it! When the teams became single sex I no longer fit in. I was teased and ostracized, though the most difficult part was not feeling like myself. So I quit. I came out as trans in 7th grade and wanted to play softball, but my state requires trans girls to take hormones for a year before they can play a sport. So I waited for three years. During that time, I became self-conscious, uncomfortable with my body, and lost all of my confidence. I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety.

I was finally approved to play on a girls team in the spring of my sophomore year of high school. Playing on a girls' team has been an incredible experience for me. I have made so many friends and improved so much, despite starting so late. My teammates treat me just like anyone else on the team. So do my coaches. My team is part of my family. We are all so different and come from different cliques, but when we're together on the field we are there for each other, no matter what. Every kid should be lucky enough to have this experience."

From Debi Jackson, a parent of a non-binary teen:

"My child, Avery, is now 15 years old. Avery doesn't even remember what it was like to be viewed as a boy. We affirmed who they are at a young age and supported a social transition before kindergarten. During that time, Avery was in a co-ed trampoline class at a local gym. The gymnastics classes at the gym were divided by gender and as we began referring to Avery as our daughter, Avery asked to move into gymnastics.

It was one additional step towards being affirmed and accepted authentically. To this day, some of my favorite photos and videos are from the first day of that class when Avery marched so confidently onto the mats with a barely grown-out traditional boyish haircut next to a gaggle of other girls with their bouncy ponytails.

Avery enthusiastically followed every word of the coach, trying forward rolls and falling off the balance beam with every step. Literally, every single step. Avery was the most gloriously awkward non-athletic creature I have ever witnessed. I can safely tell you that Avery is still a gloriously awkward non-athletic creature who will never win any athletic endeavor.

But participating in sports isn't always about winning. Playing sports helps with mental health, teaches teamwork, provides camaraderie with others, and teaches discipline and goal-setting. It opens doors to friendship, connection, and community with others. That's what my child experienced in that gymnastics class, and other trans kids deserve to experience all of those benefits, too.

I am so thankful that Avery didn't have to choose between not participating in sports or being forced to participate as a boy. Forcing a transgender child to choose between living an authentic life and playing a game is cruel.

Think about how it would feel to have your body openly discussed by others or to have the fairness of your existence and basic rights debated in a public forum. That's what you are doing to innocent kids. Please leave our kids alone. They deserve so much better from people in power."

I want to thank these people for sharing their stories and reminding us that this is about children, and daughters, and sons, and siblings, and friends.

These are real people with real experiences who deserve to feel loved and included.

I'd ask unanimous consent to enter these letters to the Committee from transgender athletes provided by the National Center for Transgender Equality.

Sports are a vital aspect of education that offers important lessons. Athletics allows young people from diverse backgrounds to engage in healthy movement and play, learn how to work as a team, and form meaningful connections.

Madam Chair, I ask that while we sit through this hearing and the hateful misinformation I'm sure is coming our way, let us not forget the children at the core of this issue.

I yield back.

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