

PERSONAL TESTIMONY PA GENERAL ASSEMBLY – EDUCATION COMMITTEE

- **TO:** PA Legislative
 - **FROM:** Erin Matyus
 - **DATE:** August 2nd, 2021
 - **RE:** PA House Bill 972
-

First, I want to say thank you to the Committee for your willingness to accept testimony on this proposed legislation. My name is Erin Matyus and I've been involved with athletics my entire life. I grew up on a pool deck watching my father mentor hundreds of swimmers over his 35-year High School coaching career, and tried my hand at every youth sport imaginable. In high school I was a decorated multi-sport athlete, earning 16 varsity letters upon graduation, and an eventual berth into our Athletics' Hall of Fame. I competed collegiately at the Division I level, working to earn a full-scholarship and serving as three-year captain for my program. And for the past decade I have worked in college athletics as a coach and administrator, most recently as the Associate Head Coach for the Lehigh University Men's and Women's Swimming and Diving teams.

I am the proud product of a large Pennsylvania public school system. A school system that laid the foundation for my successes, my college education, and ultimately my career path. A school system that taught me that *everyone* deserves the chance to play. That creed has to include a pathway to participation for trans- and non-binary youth that aligns with their most authentic selves. Because ultimately, that's what sport is at its most foundational level: a journey towards and an expression of your most authentic self.

Through athletics -- and especially through my experiences in high school and youth athletics -- I learned the lessons necessary to grow and thrive in any environment. I learned to be disciplined in my commitments, to tackle challenges head on, to tap into a reservoir of confidence I didn't know I had, to stand up for myself, and to believe in the power of Team. These are the lessons that HB 972 threatens to steal from Pennsylvania student-athletes by impeding their access to play.

I say with conviction as a female athlete and as someone that works with female athletes on a daily basis, that this proposed bill -- despite its labeling as the "Pennsylvania Fairness in Women's Sports Act" -- is nothing but inherently sexist. It perpetuates the idea that biological men are "better" at sports than women, and thus must be kept out of competition with women at all cost. I can think of more than a few biological men that I could beat in a running race right now at the age of 34; when I was in high school, I beat boys every single day. I work with female athletes that I *know* can competitively crush some of their male counterparts in a bench press, a 200-meter freestyle swim, a vertical jump, or hitting off a golf tee.

The variation that exists *within* biological gender categories is incredibly wide-ranging, and one needs only to turn on the Olympic coverage currently airing on screens of all sizes to bear witness to their true breadth. There are women that are 5'0 tall and women that are 6'5, both of which fly through the air in very different ways. There are men that have wingspans eight inches longer than their heights, and men that are small enough to perch in the helms of boats. And there are individuals -- of both genders -- that stand in one place when they compete while others have aerobic engines and lactic thresholds that allow them to compete repeatedly and for hours at a time. I see this variation as affirmation that sport is a place for ALL bodies, and for all people.

This bill subversively hints that female athletes must be protected from biological male invasion in our spaces of competition. Perhaps not a surprising suggestion, given that for years female athletes were seen as invaders in all aspects of sport. I distinctly remember walking into our high school gym where a group of

football players were lifting after class and having one of them yell out, “NO GIRLS IN THE WEIGHTROOM” -- even though they had just come off a losing season and I was a State Medalist and an All-American.

As an individual that has been discriminated against often and brazenly on the basis of my gender, I don't relish the thought of perpetuating that pattern of exclusion onto others. When we start policing bodies -- especially women's bodies -- with our own determinations of what is and isn't athletic, of what is and isn't female or male enough for competition we are not creating fairness in women's athletics, we're setting it back 50 years. Trans-girls ARE girls, and they deserve the right to compete, just like I deserved the right to be in that weight room so many years ago.

What I know is true for the female athletes that I work with is that their greatest threat is NOT transgender athlete participation in their sport. Not even close. If you truly want to address threats to female athletes, if you truly want to create fairness in women's athletics, if you truly want to support women's sports... Then fund them. At the same level of financial support you offer for men's programs when it comes to coaching, facilities, equipment, and competitive opportunities. Put your money where your words are and buy their jerseys and their products. If you truly want to support women's sports... Invest in them. Not just with your money, but with your time and your advocacy. Identify barriers that prevent female students and coaches from participating consistently and at the highest levels and create solutions to overcome them. Champion women's athletics and the individuals that make up each team: go to their games, watch them on TV, know their stories and push for better coverage in the media. If you truly want to support women's sports... Stop pretending that passing this legislation is the only thing you can do to create a more equitable experience for female athletes. We don't need your protection, we need your support. Your actual support.

Over the past few weeks, we are witness to the International Olympic Committee's (IOC's) trans-inclusion policies in action as several transgender and non-binary athletes compete among the best in the world. And for more than a decade the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) -- the largest and most predominant governing body for collegiate athletics -- has included a pathway for transgender individuals to participate in college sports. If the IOC and the NCAA -- the highest levels of competition that exist for athletes in America and in the world -- can offer the opportunity for transgender athletes to compete in the category of their affirmed sex, then surely the State of Pennsylvania can *and should* do the same.

Passing this bill would put any NCAA member institution (ie, Lehigh, Penn State, etc) in direct tension with the NCAA Transgender Policy that they are charged to uphold. Those institutions would be in violation of the policy -- and of their articulated value of inclusion -- should they support transgender competitors. And when it comes to hosting events such as Conference or Tournament Championships (think March Madness basketball games or Big Ten Soccer Championships), the NCAA Policy also specifies that events will be held only in locations “where hosts can commit to providing an environment that is safe, healthy, and free of discrimination.” With the passing of HB 972, legal discrimination against trans-athlete participation would be a potential deterrent for NCAA-hosted events (and revenue).

As an Athletics professional, a female athlete, and a proud Pennsylvanian, I am asking that this Committee *strongly* reconsider moving forward with this bill. As educators and as members of the Education Committee -- I am asking that you uphold the responsibility you have to provide equitable educational experiences for students at every level so they can develop, lead, and succeed. I know of no better place to do that than on the field of play. I firmly believe that passing HB 972 would not serve its intended purpose of creating a more fair environment for female athletes, but would only prevent Pennsylvania youth from experiencing all that sport has to offer.

Please stand up on behalf of our student-athletes by rejecting this bill and showing that Pennsylvania is a safe and fair place for ALL girls -- including trans-girls -- to be the best athlete and person they can be. Thank you.