

August 4, 2021

Testimony of Kelsea Dague
Hempfield High School — Class of 2022
Salunga, PA

Dear Pennsylvania House Education Committee,

My name is Kelsea Dague and I am a student athlete at Hempfield High School who supports letting trans athletes play. I am going to be a senior this year and I have been a starting varsity athlete on the field hockey and lacrosse teams since freshman year. I have earned a D1 scholarship to play lacrosse at Eastern Michigan University, and have achieved the highest honor in high school sports of becoming a USA All-American Lacrosse player.

In the US, field hockey is a traditionally female sport, but people of all genders are allowed to play. I have played against athletes assigned male at birth and it was not a point of concern, it did not make me or other players nervous, we just played and did our best, the same as always. High school sports are inherently unfair if you base it on age and physical ability regardless of gender. There is also an advantage in the fact that high school sports have seniors and freshmen on the same team. When I went in as a freshman I was on a team with seniors and juniors that had 2-3 years on me between physical growth, training and game sense. If we take the mindset that “I will never win,” or “I cannot compete” against people with different skills or backgrounds, we would not have team sports. An athlete's mindset should always be to do your best no matter who you are up against. Every day, every opponent is different and some days you are the best and some days you are not. We should not be looking to turn away any girls who want to play women's sports.

No sport is fair regardless of gender because every sport has athletes with advantages or disadvantages in high school. Training and skill are what matter. The difference is that high school sports should be for all kids in our state if they so choose to participate and it should be based on their identity. I cannot begin to tell you about the amazing friendships and lessons I have learned through my high school athletic career. I want all women to have the opportunities that I have had being on teams of amazing young women. While it is easy to get caught up in the competitive playing side of sports, it is best that we remember what the purpose of high School sports should be – creating a welcoming and fun environment for student athletes to express themselves and learn how to better improve themselves and the people around them.

The notion that women's scholarships are in jeopardy if we allow transgender women to participate in high school sports is not true or fair. First, they are women, participating in women's sports. Second, coaches are looking for a number of things, not just the best athlete. They are looking at grades, character, additional activities and how you could fit with the team. Third, high school athletes looking to get to the next level could be competing with or against transgender athletes as the NCAA has guidelines in place that support this, as do many professional leagues. Isn't it in an athlete's advantage to have experience with this and show

character and acceptance of athletes who might be different than us earlier in the process? At the end of the day, we as athletes control how well we play and how far we get in our athletic and academic careers. Both the sports I play are huge team sports and my teammates have helped me become the player I am. But at the end of the day, the college coach is looking at me and how well I perform and interact with my teammates. So, to say that trans athletes are taking scholarships from us is ridiculous because we perform for ourselves no matter who our teammates are.

There are bigger concerns and levels of inequity with women's high school sports than the participation of transgender athletes. In my school, boys' lacrosse covers protective equipment and uniforms while in girls' lacrosse we have to provide our own protective equipment, we only get a uniform. This past season of lacrosse, during playoffs, the boys were afforded a larger facility for their games and had the games live streamed while girls were at a smaller location which reduced attendance and the game was not live streamed. This is a bigger concern to the support and promotion of women's athletics. Fairness in athletics should be about expanding the opportunities for women's athletic programs to increase the level of participation and create more opportunities, not reducing opportunities for women to play women's sports.

Sincerely,
Kelsea Dague