

Testimony of Sophia Tellis
Dallas High School — Class of 2024
Dallas, PA

House Education Committee Hearing
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Hi, my name is Sophia Tellis. I am honored to be providing a testimony on an issue that would impact girls like me across our state. I am 15 years old, and an incoming tenth grader at Dallas High School, in northeastern PA, and I play soccer on the varsity team. I have played soccer since I can remember. It is the sport I fell in love with.

As a lifelong student athlete I fully support all girls participating on my teams or against me in matches. I don't care about another girl's race, religion, if she is gay or if she is transgender. Those things don't matter on the field. Hearing that you're considering a ban on girls who might be trans scares and deeply upsets me. Trans girls are girls. Cis girls are girls. We're just the same. I know some of you may still be learning about these issues, but for me and most of my generation, we are fully accepting of our LGBTQ friends and family. We're all human and should be treated with dignity and respect.

I would ask you to put yourself in their shoes. As lawmakers you can help the most through empathy. A baby was born and from that moment on she knew exactly who she is, and knows that she is trapped in body that people mistake for a boy's.. She grew up first feeling disconnected from the world, but then with the support of her family and friends she was finally brave enough to be who she knew she was. We wear the same clothes, and her hair is now longer than mine. Her medical care has her going through the same growing pains as me and my friends. She wears makeup and walks proudly in the halls. Now, it is the summer before 10th grade, and she is a soccer player waiting to make her debut on the varsity team. But there is one thing missing now, when she is told she cannot play the sport she loves and be comfortable just being herself.. She was brave enough to tell her family, her teachers, and her coaches who she really was even though it was scary, but now she is being told by random adults that she can't play anymore at school. In this moment, this girl holds the whole world on her shoulders. We aren't talking about the girl who wants to play football with the boys, who fights to suit up and play on the only team available to her. We're talking about a girl who wants to play soccer who is being forced to play on the boys' team because of people who are fearful of what they don't understand.

There is no reason to make a girl play on the boys' team. It doesn't make sense. She would probably be the only girl there. If someone forced me to be the only girl on the boy's team, I would be embarrassed and probably not have fun playing. It would result in dropping out, which makes this a ban. She belongs on the girls' team.

The state does not need to come in and disrupt athletes' lives, teams, and communities for a non-issue. I don't know and I don't care if I have or have not played with girls who are trans, it's not my business. I don't care if I've played against them either, even if we lost to them. If we win or lose, it's because of our skills as players, not whether we're trans or cis. The issue here is inclusion. Female rights. We should be celebrating diversity. Everyone coming onto a team has different strengths and skills. What matters at the end of the day is how you are as a team player and how dedicated you are to your training.

Female athletes don't need protection from each other, we need equal treatment. There is room for improvement for all girls' sports, there are obstacles that need to be addressed. We need more resources and opportunities, equal to what the boys have. Even though we play the same sport, boys' teams are more popular and are taken more seriously even when they don't play as well as the girls. Think of all the soccer you watch on TV. Most of them are men, and they get paid more than the women who play my sport do just because they get more attention. These are the problems. Trans girls playing with other girls, on the only team that makes any sense, is not an obstacle.

Also, parents can get competitive during games. They like to call fouls on girls just because they look bigger or scarier than their daughter. Someone could call someone transgender just for being tall and to interrupt the game. How would you prove you aren't transgender? That would be extremely awkward for everyone. It could also turn out like some international competitions and be used more against girls of color.

We are in high school and every school preaches to not let anyone bully you into not being who you want to be. Yet, when someone is doing exactly that, being who they are, the government wants to come in to say who is and who is not a girl. To say you support women's sports and then say only the 'right kind of girl' can play is hypocritical and unfair, and if you ask me I'd say it's bullying.

Putting this block on a child's life can take a toll on their mental health, for sure. Speaking from experience, mental health is not something you just overcome. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 1 in 20 children are said to have anxiety or depression in a single year. Another study conducted by Reisner (2015) stated that transgender youth are approximately four times as likely as their non-transgender peers to develop depression. There are studies that say that half of transgender teenagers had attempted suicide. For me and other cisgender girls, we don't lose anything by playing with or against girls who might be different from us. But if trans girls are banned, they lose playing the sport they love, they lose their teammates, and they lose another chance to be a normal kid. They could even lose their lives. I've watched my peers struggle. I've felt the same types of pressures and anxieties. Soccer saves me. Soccer allows me to be me. It has given me the opportunity to develop lasting friendships, the grit needed to persevere during difficult times, and the confidence to stand and speak in front of you today. To deny anyone that experience is wrong. This ban on trans female athletes is blatant discrimination on women. Trans girls are girls, just like me.

Could you imagine if this entire hearing was based on all the ways we could actually make things better for girls in sports? Trans girls deserve the same experience I get to have in high school. They deserve the same experience all girls get to have in high school. And they deserve for the adults to protect them and make sure that happens. They deserve your empathy and your support. Thank you.