



The Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and
Gender Expansive Identities of Ohio

Chairwoman Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and all members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 151. My name is Gene Dockery, and I am here today on behalf of the Ohio Counseling Association (OCA). In the OCA, I act as the Southeast Representative for the Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities of Ohio (SAIGE of Ohio) and am also the Government Relations Committee Liaison. I am a licensed professional counselor in Newark, Ohio and a Ph.D. Candidate at Ohio University. Both my clinical work and published research focuses on LGBTQIA mental health, making me well-qualified to speak on this topic today.

The OCA and our subdivision, SAIGE of Ohio opposes the provisions in Ohio House Bill 151 that will adversely impact trans, gender expansive, and intersex youth across the state. What is being called the *Save Women's Sports Act* is a discrimination effort disguised as equality. We strongly encourage legislators to remove these dangerous provisions before advancing this bill.

School sports are a community encounter. People congregate around the fields, pools, gymnasias, rinks, etc., to cheer for their children, friends, and grandkids. It rouses the spirits of the people spectating, gives the children playing a sense of purpose, and demonstrates the vitality of shared commitment and its capacity to foster a collective bond. We have seen the power of school sports to lift the spirits of an individual to an entire school district, even a state. I ask you to reminisce about an experience you or someone you know had around these matters. I would bet everyone knows someone who had a meaningful sporting experience.

And now, the State of Ohio is mulling over an action that would strip the right of participation in this fundamental part of childhood away from a select group of kids already made vulnerable simply because of their authenticity. To take this away from these kids would deprive them of an outlet that has long served as a forum for students to find camaraderie, social interaction, and physical expression of athletic passions (Kulick et al., 2019). The core of the objection to letting these children compete in school sports that align with their gender is that their biological sex will give them some kind of advantage over their cisgender opponents; this is applied specifically to people assigned male at birth who align with girls in their gender identity. This contention is one made in bad faith and divorced from the broader base of facts; there is no scientific evidence that trans children perform at a level that disadvantages their cisgender peers (Turban, 2021). The mere handful of trans, gender expansive, and intersex youth currently competing are not in any way dominating in their respective sports. This bill is trying to solve a problem that does not exist to the detriment of a persecuted minority.

Furthermore, forcing trans children to engage in activities that compel them to function from the perspective of their assigned gender on the basis of pseudoscientific presumptions has been shown to create mental health problems for said children (Horton & Carlile, 2022; Taylor et al., 2019). Essentially, foisting a gender label inconsistent with their actual gender based on what society assumed them to be causes a great deal of psychological anguish that results in suicidality, social anxiety and isolation, depression, and a bevy of other issues (Turban & Ehrensaft, 2018). If we as a society exclude these children from expressing themselves genuinely, we most certainly will do them harm, further ostracizing them as they try to make sense of their lives and find a place to fit in.

We are clinical mental health counselors, school counselors, counselor educators, and counselors-in-training. We therefore have the expertise to tell you that this will irreparably harm the mental and emotional well-being of trans, gender expansive, and intersex youth in Ohio. We urge you not to pass this bill in its current form.

References

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- Taylor, A. B., Chan, A., & Saewyc, E. M. (2021). Role models and well-being among trans and nonbinary youth. *European Journal of Public Health*, 31, iii229–iii229.
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