

February 17, 2022

Honorable Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary  
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee  
House Office Building, Room 131  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB515 Inclusive Athletic Attire Act**

Dear Chair Vanessa Atterbeary and House Ways and Means Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB515 entitled Inclusive Athletic Attire Act. I am happy to provide my written testimony and am pleased to see this addressed in this legislation.

The decision to play basketball came late in my daughters High School years but she was determined to try out for the team. She succeeded and was put on the Varsity team on her first try. I was so proud of the journey she was on; taking a leap to be a part of something that I never felt comfortable doing, playing basketball. She worked hard each game, to do her best and always stayed true to her faith as a young Muslim hijabi woman.

As a parent, it was heartbreaking to sit on the sidelines on March 3, 2017, waiting in anticipation as my daughter was ready to play in her first Regional Finals basketball game, along with her Watkins Mill High School teammates. That anticipation was short-lived rather snatched away due to a technicality that neither of us were aware of. A piece of paper, a written waiver stood in the way of her having the privilege of playing in that game. A referee for that fateful game cited the National Federation of State High School Associations' rule book which states, 'that head decorations and headwear are prohibited' made the decision to ask for such waiver. This waiver documentation should be with the Athletic Director or Coach, at all games, in case the need arises. This waiver would have excused her to play with her sacred hijab, which is like second nature as putting on a shirt or pants when she goes out. The hijab is very distinguishable for a Muslim woman, easy to identify.

As my daughter sat on the bench not one but all four quarters, I became worried about her not playing. That worry turned to annoyance, which turned to frustration, and pivoted to anger. Why? As it turned out, not once during the entire basketball season in Montgomery County, was she informed that she should have requested a waiver, because she was different in one way – her Hijab. The one thing that made her unique, stand-out, and one-of-a-kind – was an issue. Neither the Athletic director nor her coach informed her that such a paper, this waiver, held so much power to exclude her from playing in the Regional finals.

Times are changing, thus should the archaic rules in many sports, organizations and institutions should be revised. One should not be singled out, discriminated against or made to feel left out because of the way they wear their hair, or head covering, or for how they dress.

I truly believe that this HB515 bill is much needed and I fully support your commitment to protect the religious freedom of our vastly different makeup, our wonderful community. I respectfully urge your vote in favor of it. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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