

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:

I feel a great sense of honor to be able to use my voice and testify in support of HB515 and I am immensely thankful to the representatives who have introduced this legislation in response to my personal experience. This has forever shaped my high school career and the future of Maryland Public High Schools and Community Colleges. Looking back at the trials I faced while being on the varsity basketball team at Watkins Mill High School, my battles began when I would wear long sleeve shirts under my jersey and the referees withheld me from playing because my undershirt was not a part of the official uniform. As a woman, who is Muslim and observes hijab, conforming my modesty to fit into the archaic rulings is something that is not up for negotiation. On many occasions, I observed that some referees allowed other players, especially the boys, to wear opposite color undershirts that played for the same team. I often felt discriminated against for just wearing an undershirt in upholding my religious belief of modesty.

In my 11 years of wearing hijab, I have gotten my fair share of stares and offensive jokes, but I never thought I would experience a ruling from a sport that would make me authenticate my sincerity to my faith. I had previously played in 24 basketballs tournaments at my school, during the season, and on March 3, 2017, everything shifted for me. My team had lost the regional final against Oxon Hill High School and after losing, my coach Donita Adams, pulled me aside informing me that I was not able to play due to not having the official documentation explaining my reason for hijab. Here is my reason, I am Muslim. Wearing hijab is apart of my uniform that God and God alone can rule on. I should not be a target for simply practicing what I believe is per my faith. A need for documentation about wearing a hijab in a sport was never brought to my attention when I tried out for the team- and it certainly was never discussed with me by the referee before the regional final. Nonetheless, I am somewhat grateful to the Oxon Hill referee who chose to enforce that archaic ruling on that day, and I have gained many opportunities to impact change and increased community support.

By sharing my story and one who has experienced the injustices against people of faith, who observe head coverings, I am more than glad to call for the HB515 bill. Thank you for giving me the privilege of this written testimony and thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB515 entitled Inclusive Athletic Attire Act. I respectfully urge your vote in favor of it. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Je'Nan Hayes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right from the end of the name.

Je'Nan Hayes
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